

THE NEW MONKEYWRENCHER • SEX, DRUGS AND ESL

APRIL 2009

IN THESE TIMES

WANTED: a perp
walk for **plutocrats**

Iran's history comes
out of the **closet**

TO BOYCOTT ISRAEL...OR NOT?

Naomi Klein and Rabbi Arthur Waskow debate the
best way to create peace in the Middle East

PLUS:

Elizabeth Sanders on
do-it-yourself governance

Measuring Electoral Success

IN THE MARCH 3 special primary election for the 5th congressional district seat in Illinois, formerly held by White House Chief-of-Staff Rahm Emanuel, many progressives voted their hopes, supporting Tom Geoghegan, a Chicago labor lawyer and author.

Geoghegan's candidacy had been endorsed by *The Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt, Salon's Joe Conason and Open-Left.com, among others. (Disclosure: I wrote a fundraising letter for the campaign.) Yet in the end, reform-minded Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley won the Democratic primary with 22 percent of the 55,000 Democratic votes cast. Geoghegan placed seventh out of a field of 12, with 6 percent of the vote.

Geoghegan was a movement progressive who faced a steep uphill climb in his first race for Congress. Tom would have been a great representative, who would have helped our movement in Congress as he does in his writings and his practice of labor law. But his loss doesn't make our contributions to his campaign a waste.

Sometimes we support candidates we may not like, but just because they're in an important contested race for a Republican seat, we're willing to give our labor or dollars to push them over the goal line. Other times, we give out of movement solidarity to people we fully admire, knowing that they probably will lose.

We need to recognize both contributions are worthwhile. In the first example, they can help win an important seat. In the latter, they help develop solidarity and build a network for future campaigns.

There is a value in backing long shots, even if those long shots lose. In Geoghegan's case, many progressives supported someone who has been an important voice on so many issues, and who has had the courage to fight the good fight. He got beat by a pool of mostly career politicians. Does

that mean their work and money are a waste? If we categorize it as such, progressives risk becoming a bloodless investment fund—a typical PAC.

That strategy hasn't worked for the institutional players. The Service Employees International Union spent \$300,000 backing who it considered to be the more "electable" candidate, state Rep. Sarah Feigenholtz, who got 17 percent of the vote. Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO put its cash and troops at the service of another "electable" candidate, state Rep. John Fritchey, who got 18 percent. What might have happened had unions joined forces and thrown their support behind the race's unquestioned champion of labor? Would it have possibly made him "electable"?

Geoghegan backers helped build a support system for future progressive projects and campaigns. Such a culture of participation and engagement is necessary to let other progressives know that that they can count on the movement's rank and file when they decide to risk a run for office, even if they aren't a frontrunner or a career politician.

It's true that winning only "moral victories"—rather than electoral ones—gets old. But a short-term "moral victory" often leads to concrete gains down the road. Indeed, every victory is won on the experience of past defeats, and the setbacks and long hours worked on a campaign, even an unsuccessful one, feed into a bank of know-how and savvy that will serve future campaigns for years to come. The friendships and relationships formed on a campaign provide the basis for a social network that nurtures and supports future initiatives.

We need to be ready and eager for the next progressive fight—even it is yet another losing skirmish. Why? Because it is all part of a bigger battle, one that we are finally beginning to win.

—David Sirota

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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COVER

On Jan. 28, an Israeli army bulldozer, built by Caterpillar, destroys a Palestinian house that was built without a municipal permit in the neighborhood of Beit Hanina in occupied east Jerusalem. In the background is the Jewish settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev. According to Peace Now, an Israeli peace group, construction in Israeli settlements on the occupied West Bank jumped 60 percent in 2008, in the wake of the relaunching of the Middle East peace process by the United States. (Photo by Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images)

letters



Global faith

The threatened excommunication of the Rev. Roy Bourgeois for his sponsorship of female clergy ("Roy Bourgeois Faces Excommunication," March) contravenes scriptural intent, since the resurrected Jesus first chose to appear to Mary Magdalene, and *she* informed the Apostles. It is clear that the early exclusion of women from Holy Orders was only cultural.

Meanwhile, 5,000 priests have allegedly sexually abused 12,000 children in the United States alone, yet the Vatican has failed to investigate child sex abuse cases by priests in other countries—inaction that continues to endanger the faith worldwide.

John Tomasin
West New York, N.J.

Begone, Gitmo!

Eric Lewis's viewpoint on Guantánamo ("Closing America's Torture Chambers," March) is very timely, and it is hoped that President Obama remains steadfast to

his campaign promise.

Obama should not get distracted with the recidivism threats espoused by those in the previous administration. These are nothing but weak attempts to justify their ill-conceived scheme. They talk about the palpable threat posed by released prisoners but the truth is that the threat will always remain (we have had more than six years to witness this) even if they are not released.

It is time to admit that we have failed in the attempt to use Gitmo to find Osama bin Laden's whereabouts. Let's close up shop. If not now, when?

Normally taking war prisoners is done to reduce personnel from a battlefield, but in this case, it was done to find details of a ticking bomb—namely the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden. It is time to admit that we failed in this attempt and close up shop. If not now, when?

G.M. Chandu
Flushing, N.Y.

Universal 4-1-1

The debate between Stefie Woolhandler, co-director of Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) and Richard Kirsch, national campaign manager for Health Care for America Now (HCAN) in the January issue ("Which Way to Universal Healthcare?") was excellent. Moderator Ezra Klein posed great questions,

which helped readers to understand the issues involved in this very complicated topic.

Here's what I would like to relay to the two healthcare reformers:

To Woolhandler: It's going to take a mass organization on the scale of the anti-Vietnam War movement to achieve real healthcare reform in the United States. PNHP should try to organize public activities that

academic comfort zone and lead people to the streets and into the ballot box.

To Kirsch: You want to preserve the role of profit in American health insurance. OK. But you need to spell out how high you will make the barriers to care (co-pays, deductibles, co-insurance, etc.) in order to keep profit in the system. And, you need to acknowledge how much needed care will be avoided by people who can't afford the out-of-pockets.

Brian King
Seattle

CORRECTION

At the end of Lucy Komisar's "Cafeteria Kickbacks" (March), we failed to credit the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute for its generous support. We regret the omission.

INTHESETIMES.COM



Stop by InTheseTimes.com for 20 Questions with Jessica Valenti, executive editor of Feministing.com, a blog and online community dedicated to young feminists. Valenti is author of several books, including *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women*.

InTheseTimes.com's 20 Questions series spotlights progressive writers, activists, and artists, and can be found at the top-right corner of our homepage. A new feature is posted there every two weeks.



And in her monthly InTheseTimes.com column, Megan Tady will delve into how the \$7.2 billion allocated for broadband funding in February's stimulus package—a major victory for media reform advocates—can be spent wisely to help all Americans become fully connected to the Internet.

contributors

Dear Reader,

You might have noticed that the issue you hold in your hands looks and feels a little different. Because of the economic crisis, we regret having to cut back on the number of pages in each issue.

As always, we value your feedback and hope you'll continue to keep the lines of communication open. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have suggestions, comments or fundraising leads.

On a different note, MSNBC is looking for a host to fill its 10 p.m. (EST) slot following "The Rachel Maddow Show." *In These Times* Senior Editor David Sirota is among the contenders vying for that position.

You can help make that possible by taking a minute to e-mail MSNBC at letters@msnbc.com to tell the producers that you think David would be a great host for the open slot.

MSNBC President Phil Griffin told the *New York Times* that the selection process for choosing the new host will be "organic," which means that your input can make a difference.

In solidarity.



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher



STEVE FAKE grew up in eastern Pennsylvania and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh. He became interested in radical politics after seeing *Good Will Hunting*, where he first heard of Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky. He lives and works in Boston.



KEVIN FUNK, a native of York, Pa., graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with degrees in political science and journalism. He is currently based in Chile. Fake and Funk co-authored *Scramble For Africa: Darfur-Intervention and the USA*. Their commentaries

can be found at www.scrambleforafrica.org.



ELIZABETH SANDERS, a professor of Government at Cornell University, has published articles on American political development, economic regulation, social movements and presidential politics. She is the author of *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

CHRISTINA GERHARDT is a visiting scholar at Columbia University who is finishing *Critique of Ethical Violence: The Trauma of Terrorism*, a book about the representations of the Red Army Faction in literature, art and film. Her articles have appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Nation* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.



The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

how to reach us

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



\$50 Cost, in millions, of Bank of America's luxury jet

1.5 Number of hours bank President Ken Lewis spent on a Feb. 26 flight from corporate headquarters in Charlotte, N.C., to New York after being subpoenaed to disclose a list of bonus payments, which Lewis refused to do

\$5,000 Minimum amount spent on gasoline and pilots for one hour on the jet

\$440 Amount that a commercial flight on U.S. Airways would have cost



The man who is angered by nothing cares about nothing.

—EDWARD ABBEY, AUTHOR



THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

Among certain denizens of Pundit Wankerdome, Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) is a model of centrist probity, a "fiscal hawk" whose discerning eye scopes federal budgets, on the lookout for "wasteful spending" to be smote with righteous fury. It was this reputation that Gregg cited when he recently withdrew his nomination as Commerce Secretary, ruling that, under the profligate Obama administration, he

"couldn't be Judd Gregg" and that he was simply unable to "trim my sails."

THE QUO:

Except, of course, when he is.

On Feb. 27, the AP reported that Gregg has procured \$66.4 million in federal earmarks for the Pease International Tradeport, a Portsmouth, N.H., business park built on the remains of a closed Air Force base. That might certainly be worthwhile,



but it's a touch unseemly that Gregg has also invested heavily in his developer brother Cyrus' office projects at Pease, investments that have garnered him at least \$240,000 and perhaps as much as \$651,801.

IN THESE TIMES

Dear *In These Times* Community,

You can help all of us get through The Great Depression II by helping *In These Times* get its message out.

Not since FDR has there been a more auspicious time to enact a progressive economic agenda. But we can't simply count on the Obama administration to do the job. People will need to mobilize. In her essay "Do-It-Yourself Governance" on page 20, Cornell University political science professor Elizabeth Sanders writes:

"Throughout our history, it has been social movements (defined as organized and sustained collective action by people outside formal centers of power to press their grievances on the state) that have made public officials accountable and broadly responsive."

That makes independent publications like *In These Times* essential.

The mainstream media is already constructing self-serving, conservative narratives about the current crisis. *In These Times* promises to expose the biases of the corporate press to provide our social movements the alternative news and analysis they need.

But we need you to help *In These Times* keep on rabble-rousing. You can find an envelope for your contribution between pages 18 and 19.

In solidarity,



Joel Bleifuss
Editor and Publisher

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Wanted: A Perp Walk For Plutocrats



MY HUSBAND AND I were engaged in our usual dinner table rant about politics and the economy. Having made the mistake of opening my latest retirement statement and seeing that I, like millions, will now have to work until I'm 90 (or dead, whichever comes first), I proposed that we needed the financial equivalent of the Nuremberg trials for all

of the greedy, unprincipled bastards who got us into this mess. My husband—older, wiser and even less forgiving than I—suggested we deal with these guys the way the Chinese dealt with the melamine scandal: by sentencing two of its perpetrators to death.

So imagine my surprise when, later that night, on "Real Time with Bill Maher," I heard Tina Brown propose the Nuremberg trial idea and Maher propose the melamine solution.

You know, people really want some accountability here. They also want faces and names attached to "subprime mortgages," "derivatives," "mortgage-backed securities" and "credit default swaps."

Now, I'm one of the lucky ones. I may one day be teetering to work with a walker, but I still have a job, a house and healthcare. But millions of people are in desperate straits, their lives ruined, jobless, broke, homeless. And yet, could we have something like the Nuremberg trials, given that most of the rapacious swine behind this mess may not have actually committed crimes, what with the absence of regulations?

I imagine we still could. Lawyers can be quite creative when they put their minds to it.

We need this kind of legal-media event because the broadcast media in particular have been dreadful in unpacking this disaster for everyday people so we can understand what the hell a credit default swap even is. Yes, the news media covered the bailout debates (with precious little depth or analysis), the Wall Street Christmas bonus scandals (a story broken by the *New York Times*), and the housing meltdown.

But where are the prime-time documentaries and in-depth investigative reports about all this? Some honorable exceptions aside—see "Frontline's" terrific *Inside the Meltdown*, available online, or CNBC's *House of Cards*,

also online—we've mostly been left shaking our fists at the cosmos and the generic concept of "the banker."

Certainly at the top of most people's list for such a Nuremberg-style tribunal would be Bernie Madoff. In addition to all the people and institutions he swindled, he even bilked Elie Wiesel's Foundation for Humanity out of \$15 million. Wiesel implicitly endorsed my Nuremberg idea when he told the *New York Post*, "Whatever [there] is to hurt him should be invented. ... He should go before a group of judges who would imagine a punishment for him."

But there are plenty of others who should squirm in the witness stand about whom we know very little. How about Edward Liddy, CEO of AIG, currently making the PR rounds on TV trying to do damage control? In fact, AIG

I propose the need for the financial equivalent of the Nuremberg trials for all the greedy, unprincipled bastards who got us into this mess.

founder Maurice Greenberg just filed suit against the company, alleging it perpetrated securities fraud. Liddy, in turn, claims that most of the problems besetting AIG happened on Greenberg's watch. Then

there are Liddy's predecessors, Martin Sullivan and Robert Willumstad. Who are these guys? Why not put all of them under the klieg lights?

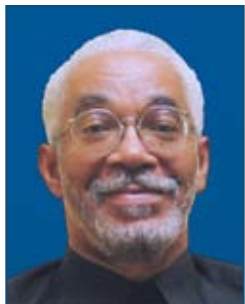
I think we'd all welcome some tough cross-examination of former Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain, the guy who gave \$3.6 billion in bonuses to top execs this past December and redecorated his office to the tune of \$1.2 million at the same time his company lost \$25 billion in 2008. (And since Merrill Lynch benefited from federal bailout money, don't we own some of the swag in his office?) When the news broke about Merrill Lynch's staggering fourth quarter losses, Thain was skiing in Vail, Colo. Tell me this wouldn't make great TV.

How about all the folks at Countrywide Financial who, for starters, steered low income and minority borrowers to higher-interest and subprime loans? As the kings of the subprime disaster charged with making predatory loans, let's put these guys on the hot seat. (And, by the way, we really need former Bush Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson on there, too.)

This whole meltdown has been so mystified with jargon, taken for granted as confusing and unfathomable, that we've been persuaded we can't get it. I bet we can. We deserve a big, public tribunal with perp walks, outraged and preening prosecutors, constant media coverage and revenge. This is how you get to "never again." ■

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

African Americans Back Burris



THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY's unified efforts to retain Roland Burris as the lone black U.S. senator has chastened national Democrats, forcing them to accept a scandal-scarred candidate to fill the vacant Senate seat of President Barack Obama. This race-themed political drama is unfolding in a state that, just two months earlier, was basking in the glow of

Obama's multiracial political success.

Burris is a long-time minion of the Illinois Democratic Party, elected four times to statewide office, including three terms as state comptroller and one as attorney general. He has also run unsuccessfully for mayor of Chicago, the U.S. Senate and for governor.

Long a venerable party hack, Burris was elected vice chair of the Democratic National Committee in 1985, specifically to offset the progressive political forces mobilized by the Rev. Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign. However, Burris, now 71, has chosen the role of political insurgent, defying calls from the Democratic establishment to step down.

Through it all, the black community in Burris's Chicago home base, urged him to hang tough and resist the pressure to resign. Black activists and political leaders saw the attempt to oust Burris as a barely disguised attempt to recover the Senate seat for a preferred white candidate.

After some initial resistance in the U.S. Senate—and after Burris testified in the Illinois House that he had no substantive contact with now-impeached Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich concerning the coveted seat—the congressional body reluctantly welcomed its lone black member. (In case anyone missed it, the Illinois legislature removed Blagojevich from office on Jan. 29, after U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald filed a criminal complaint against the former governor with various pay-to-play schemes. Blagojevich still denies any wrongdoing.)

Meanwhile, Burris seemed to be settling in, providing badly needed Democratic votes for the contentious legislative battles of the early Obama administration.

But in mid-February, the *Chicago Sun-Times* revealed that Burris submitted a supplementary affidavit to the Il-

linois House that admitted additional contacts with aides to Blagojevich—including Blagojevich's brother, Rob—that Burris failed to disclose in earlier testimony.

Burris claims the contacts were made before the governor's Dec. 9 arrest and merely reflect an ongoing political relationship. Although Burris was Blagojevich's political rival in the 2002 gubernatorial primary, he, like most other party luminaries, also helped raise funds for him—the first Democratic governor in Illinois in many years.

The affidavit triggered increased and more fevered demands for Burris to resign.

However, Chicago's black community mobilized stiff resistance for his resignation, and, through community radio stations and several South Side churches, organized strong support for the newly minted senator.

It seems a bit incongruent that these race-based tensions should erupt in the same state that launched Obama, a black candidate

whose political success hinted at a new era of racial cooperation and progress.

That assessment was naive at best, ignoring centuries of socialization and embedded structural biases. As recently revealed by the racially disparate reactions to the celebrated *New York Post* cartoon (that depicted a bloodied, cop-killed chimp as the author of the Obama administration's stimulus package), we are far from a post-racial society—unless we mean the *New York Post*.

It's possible, in fact, that Obama's victory could flush out even more evidence of racial hostility. The Southern Poverty Law Center, for example, has tracked a rise in the number and activity of various hate groups across the country and it attributes their growth to Obama's election and the faltering economy.

Many of Burris's black supporters believe that racial motives were key to those who opposed his Senate seating.

"The notion that a black incumbent would be less likely to retain the seat is the argument often advanced for opposing Burris," argues Delmarie Cobb, Burris's media consultant. "Well, although that's disguised as a political argument, it's really an assumption based on racial biases."

There's a reason why only three black U.S. senators have served in Congress since Reconstruction, Burris's supporters argue, but that reason won't stop the fourth one. ■

Black activists and political leaders saw the attempt to oust Burris as a thinly disguised attempt to recover the Senate seat for a white candidate.



JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

De-escalating the Drug War

Obama's pick to head ONDCP is better than your average drug czar

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

PRESIDENT OBAMA CAUGHT EVEN close observers off-guard with his mid-February nomination for the nation's new drug czar, R. Gil Kerlikowske.

Kerlikowske, 59, Seattle's police chief, with nearly 40 years in law enforcement behind his badge, will direct the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), pending Senate approval.

But Kerlikowske isn't just any urban police chief. He's the top cop of a city with a progressive reputation on several drug-related matters, including needle-exchange programs and marijuana possession laws.

Kerlikowske has a reputation as a level-headed and effective leader, having served as police chief in three other cities—Buffalo,

N.Y., Port St. Lucie and Fort Pierce, Fla.—all of which recorded decreases in serious and violent crime during his tenure.

Although Kerlikowske's opinions on drug policies reforms are still largely unknown, he differs from the last drug czar, John Walters, in many ways.

For one, the police chief has not tried to interfere with Seattle's needle-exchange programs. For another, Kerlikowske is on the record as someone who believes that safer, healthier communities require stricter gun controls; the restoration of voting rights to ex-prisoners (as well as re-entry programs); community-involved policing; and alternatives to sentencing for nonviolent drug offenders, especially in the form of drug courts.

In his eight years in Seattle, Kerlikowske has shown interest in outreach programs in neighborhoods with high concentrations of drug users. In addition, under his tenure, local police have largely left alone Seattle's medical marijuana users and providers, as well as the hundreds of thousands of attendees at Seattle's annual Hempfest, the largest such event in the country.

And in what could be the most controversial portion of his Senate confirmation, Kerlikowske let stand a directive that marijuana-related arrests should be the lowest priority for the Seattle Police Department, in accordance with a successful 2003 Seattle voter initiative, I-75.

"He recognizes that we can't arrest our way out of these problems," says Alison Chinn Holcomb, drug policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Washington. "Seattle is a leader in exploring alternatives to reliance on criminal sanctions as the primary response to drug use and abuse, and Chief Kerlikowske has been someone that has allowed that exploration to go forward."

By contrast, while directing the ONDCP, Walters made it clear he wasn't interested in considering alternatives to the status quo. "Whatever challenges await, President-elect Obama will not have to reinvent the wheel when it comes to keeping a lid on the use of illegal drugs," Walters wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed on Dec. 5. "Our policy has been a success—although that success is one of Washington's best kept secrets."

But the National Academy on Public Administration (NAPA) disputes that assessment. In its recently released Senate-commissioned report, the nonpartisan coalition found that Walters and his predecessors consistently relied on questionable, single-source data and unscientific research in the ONDCP's media campaigns.

NAPA also reported that, under Walters, the ONDCP had a disproportionate number of GOP political appointees and people working supervisory roles. (Even potential interns were asked how they voted in the presidential elections during interviews, according to NAPA). If con-

firmed, Kerlikowske will inherit a poorly staffed office. (More than 25 percent of the ONDCP's employees left in January.)

Ethan Nadelmann, director of the national drug policy reform organization Drug Policy Alliance, says Kerlikowske is up to the task. "Kerlikowske isn't going to be in this alone," he says. "President Obama has made a very public commitment to certain reforms, including his support for federal funding of needle exchange and an end to the crack/powder cocaine disparity."

Attorney General Eric Holder, who worked with Kerlikowske from 1998 until 2000 at the Department of Justice, announced in late February that the Obama administration would not support continued Drug Enforcement Agency raids on medical marijuana dispensaries.

"Where [Kerlikowske is] going to be stuck is what to do about Afghanistan and Mexico, among many other countries dealing with high levels of violence and drug trafficking," Nadelmann says.

Kerlikowske is also likely to stumble if he tries to address racial profiling, dispropor-

tionate incarceration or the police brutality that have been intrinsic to the drug war.

Although his personal outreach to black community leaders has been noteworthy, some critics say Kerlikowske has done little to lessen the frequency of racial profiling and gang violence. In fact, in 2007, the Seattle NAACP called for his resignation, accusing Kerlikowske of covering up instances of racial profiling, false arrest and abuse at the hands of Seattle police officers.

Since I-75 passed, the ACLU's Holcomb says the number of whites arrested and referred for prosecution by the Seattle Police Department has dropped significantly, whereas African Americans have not fared as well. Black residents make up only 7.8 percent of Seattle's population, but they were arrested for marijuana "incidents" at roughly 12 times the rate of non-Latino whites in 2006.

Any optimism should be cautious and considered, Holcomb says: "This is the most hopeful nomination that we've seen in a long time, but that doesn't mean that we should get too comfortable." ■

Uncovering Haiti's Hidden History

A CONGRESSIONAL BILL THAT would create a truth commission to explore the U.S. role in the 2004 regime change in Haiti is languishing in the House Foreign Affairs Committee with only 12 co-sponsors. But Rep. Barbara Lee's (D-Calif.) H.R. 331 has sparked hope among some Haitians who think the bill might pass under a friendly Obama administration and bring needed change to the indebted island nation.

Lee introduced the bill Jan. 8 without fanfare. She has brought the same bill to the U.S. House almost every year since 2004. It has never advanced out of committee.

The commission's task would be to determine what happened on Feb. 29, 2004, and the months leading up to the removal of Haiti's President Jean Bertrand Aristide, currently exiled in South Africa.

The official U.S. position goes something like this: In February 2004, an

appall-o-meter

0.6 Porn on the Prairie

A new study finds that Internet porn consumption habits vary little across this great land of ours, but that to the extent that they do, they are more pronounced in states where people go to church and vote Republican.

Benjamin Edelman of Harvard Business School looked at credit card receipts from the online adult industry over two years. As *New Scientist* magazine reports, he found that eight of the 10 horniest states returned their electoral votes to John McCain in 2008.

Meanwhile, six of the 10 most chaste returned Obama. States with high concentrations of churchgoers showed fitting deference to the Creator by downloading less porn on the Sabbath; however, they made up for lost time throughout the rest of the week.

2.9 Mistakes Were Made

The unapologetic apology is an underappreciated genre of American literature. It should really have its own award. If there were, my vote would go to Mayor Dean Grose of Los Alamitos, Calif., for his virtu-

oso performance after having sent an e-mail around with a picture that showed the White House lawn converted into a watermelon patch. "No Easter egg hunt this year," it read.

"The attention brought to this matter has sadly created an image of me which is most unfortunate," Grose wrote, by way of non-apology, according to the *Orange County Register*. "I recognize that I've made a mistake and have taken steps to make sure this is never repeated."

Grose, who has announced he will resign, also earns oak clusters on his award for the plucky contention that he was unaware of any stereotypes linking African Americans to the love of watermelon. Nice going, Mr. Mayor!

5.5 Life Imitates Porn

You might say that Steven A. Russo has been starring in his own porn movie. The 36-year-old divorced dad was known to allow his 17-year-old son to host drink-



ing parties at the family's McManse in Bethlehem Township, Pa. At one such gathering in December, according to the Easton, Pa., *Express-Times*, Russo supplied beer, rum and vodka to his son's guests, who ranged in age from 14 to 16, some of whom were girls in cheerleading uniforms.

According to police, Russo was regaling the company with tales of his sexual exploits when he got the idea of inviting the girls to use the stripper pole he apparently kept in the basement. The girls complied. As music pumped, Russo exhorted them with shouts of, "Get on that pole!"

Pictures appeared, inevitably, on Facebook, showing a member of the cheerleading squad distinguishing herself on the pole, and of two girls kissing Russo on the cheeks. Russo has been slapped with a raft of charges, including nine counts of corruption of minors.

—Dave Mulcahey

THE PRISON BOOK PROGRAM

Education can increase the likelihood that prisoners, once out of prison, will stay out. Yet many prisoners don't have access to educational materials that meet their needs, and most prisons prohibit family and friends from giving them books. (Books received from booksellers and publishers are permitted, however.)

"For many prisoners, the path to their social, political, spiritual and educational growth and development can be tracked by following the 'footprints' of the worn volumes of books they've read," writes Ray Champagne a prisoner at the state prison in Shirley, Mass.

Since 1972 the Prison Book Program, affiliated with the Lucy Parson's Bookstore in Quincy, Mass., has been sending free books to prisoners.

Thanks to donations, in 2008, the Prison Book Program sent 15,306 books to 7,653 prisoners.

One inmate at the Illinois state prison in Sussex wrote: "I would like to express my appreciation for your kindness and dedication to putting substance back into the word 'corrections,' also for assisting me [through] such trying times with tools to free myself mentally. Thanks for unlocking the gates."

To donate a book or to find out other ways to get involved, visit www.prisonbookprogram.org.

—Selena Kohel



armed militia was poised to take over the capital, Port-au-Prince. To avoid a bloodbath, Aristide called on the Americans to airlift him and his wife to safety.

Aristide "left the country with our assistance, which he requested," Mari Toliver, spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in Haiti, told *In These Times* in August. (Karl Duckworth, spokesperson for the State Department, said that he could not comment on the U.S. role in Aristide's departure, as the Obama State Department is doing a "complete evaluation of all the areas to see where we will be on issues.")

Aristide tells a different story. He says that a rag-tag band of some 200 rebels strong-armed poorly equipped police stations in several Haitian towns, but posed no threat to the capital, the president or the central government. Aristide says American officials forced him to board a plane whose destination was unknown.

Congress has only once formally addressed the question of the U.S. role in the coup. On March 3, 2004, the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee held a hearing, providing the opportunity for Congress to question State Department officials. Those testifying were not under oath; there were no follow-up hearings.

The week following the hearing, Lee introduced her bill on the House floor, explaining that the purpose of the truth commission was to "find out more about the events leading up to President Aristide's departure, the twilight activities of his alleged resignation, the current unconstitutional government, and the ongoing turmoil, fear, and misinformation that is still flowing out of Haiti."

In 2004, 49 representatives co-sponsored the bill.

Nicole Lee, executive director of Washington, D.C.-based TransAfrica Forum, an advocacy group, is an attorney who, before the coup, lived in Haiti. Lee (no relation to the congresswoman) says one of the key functions of the commission would be to document the role of the International Republican Institute (IRI) in destabilizing the Haitian government. The nonprofit IRI is affiliated with the Republican Party and funded, in part, by the nonprofit National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which



Demonstrators march through Port-au-Prince on July 15, 2008, in support of exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Congress partially funds "to strengthen democratic institutions around the world through nongovernmental efforts," according to the NED website.

"The International Republican Institute all along really fomented a lot of tension between the Democratic Convergence [the anti-Aristide party] and the government," says Lee. "There were reports—and continue to be reports—that the IRI provided information and also provided funding and training to former Haitian military officials that ended up coming across the border with the Dominican Republic" leading to the February 2004 coup, she says.

Unless the truth about the coup is uncovered, Congress will write off the Bush policy of regime change as an anomaly, says Lee.

Meanwhile, the proposed bill has elicited response in Haiti. From exile, Aristide referenced the bill in a statement read recently on the radio by a representative: Lee's bill leads us to believe that the new American administration will not support the coup d'état as was the case for the previous administration, the statement said.

Yvonne Zapzap heads the Families of Political Prisoners Collective and spoke by phone from Haiti through a translator. She says Haitians are aware of the bill and believe a truth commission would help end the lingering effects of the coup.

People voted for [current President René] Préval so that the political prisoners would be out of jail, but people are still in

jail, she says, referring to supporters imprisoned without trial during the 2004 to 2006 U.S.-appointed interim government. The impacts of the coup are still present since Aristide was snatched from Haiti, she says.

TransAfrica Forum's Lee puts it this way: "When Aristide was removed, water projects stopped, education projects stopped, healthcare clinics shut down. It wasn't just about removing a leader, it was about destroying a real democracy. And that really needs to be accounted for."

—Judith Scherr

Global Warming Accelerates

SEA LEVELS ARE rising much faster than expected—perhaps by three feet or more by 2100, according to climate scientists at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) annual meeting in Chicago in February.

Scientists there also announced that global warming is increasing at a greater rate than the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted in its 2007 Fourth Assessment report.

For the last 15 years, sea levels, measured by satellite and by gauges in the ocean, rose twice as fast as in the past half century. And Stefan Rahmstorf, an oceanographer at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change, notes that between 1961 and 2003, sea level has risen 50 percent faster than computer models predicted. Given these results, he said new modeling can't yet be done "with any confidence."

The sea level increase was brought on by melting ice sheets and glaciers, and the warming of the ocean, which causes water to expand. Because the effects of climate change on sea level have a long lag time, the expected rise by 2100 is merely the tip of the iceberg.

"In 100 years, we will only see a small fraction of the sea level rise we are setting in motion," says Rahmstorf. Unless we immediately and significantly reduce emissions, he says, "We may commit our planet to a very long-term sea level rise measured in meters."

Not only would a three-foot rise liter-

ally flood many cities, it would also have ripple effects that include food shortages, political conflicts and disease epidemics, as countries struggle to deal with millions of internally displaced people.

"Whether there will be environmental refugees is not a question of 'if' but 'when, where and how we deal with it,'" says John Church, a scientist with the World Climate Research Programme.

In the Pliocene era 3 million years ago, the sea level was 131 feet higher than it is today. During the last Ice Age, 20,000 years ago, the level was about 394 feet lower than today—and the average temperature then was roughly 40 degrees Fahrenheit colder.

But modern coastal development and industrialization have occurred under a period of temporary sea level stability—which likely would not have been maintained long term, even without the anthropogenic effects of climate change accelerating sea level rise.

Not only are scientists concerned about the overall rise in sea level, but also the expected increase in storm surges. Hurricanes have increased in strength and duration, an effect scientists attribute to climate change. And the trend is expected to continue.

While impoverished people in developing countries will be most affected, developed countries will also suffer. In the United States, rising sea level and increasing storm surges mean major floods will become common in places they have never happened before, catching many people without flood insurance. Already few private insurers offer flood coverage because the payouts are so great. The U.S. government picks up the slack through a flood insurance program administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). But if many more people suddenly need flood insurance, taxpayers may not be able to foot the bill.

In a worst-case scenario, melting ice sheets and glaciers in the Arctic region could cause severe chilling in the United States and Europe, because the influx of fresh water into the ocean could disrupt or slow thermohaline circulation. Also known as the "ocean conveyor belt," this is the process whereby warm water from the tropics flows northward, moderating and warming

the climate. When it hits the Arctic, it cools and sinks, then flows back toward the tropics. Some scientists fear extra fresh water from melting ice could prevent the water from sinking, and interrupt the cycle.

Finally, climate change is also making oceans more acidic. As the pH of the ocean drops, the calcium carbonate creatures—ranging from zooplankton to shellfish—will have a harder time making



Seagulls stand on an iceberg floating in a fjord near Ilulissat in Greenland.

their shells. There have already been significant reductions or changes in calcium carbonate creatures because of acidification, with effects resonating up the food chain to marine mammals like walrus and even humans. If acidification continues, the oceans will likely be increasingly populated by jellyfish and other slimy, primordial creatures, scientists say.

As with other effects of climate change, acidification and sea level rise could trigger positive feedback loops that cause exponentially greater effects than otherwise predicted. An example of such a feedback loop would be the melting of Arctic permafrost, which releases massive quantities of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas that would accelerate warming even more.

"The warmer you get the greater the burden from these feedbacks," says Christopher Field, an author of the IPCC assessments. "When you get a runaway greenhouse effect is when the oceans boil. We don't expect that. But it's certainly possible we could have a world very unattractive by the standards we live by today."

—Kari Lydersen



KABUL, AFGHANISTAN—On Feb. 8, Nasim, a heroin addict for the last five years, stood inside the abandoned Russian Cultural Center, which is a heroin gathering point. The number of addicts is on the rise in Kabul as unemployment increases and the drug continues to be readily available and extremely cheap, costing only 50 afghany per hit, or \$1. (Photo by Paula Bronstein/Getty Images)

'Zee' End of Blackwater?

TO DISTANCE ITSELF from ongoing controversies, lawsuits and canceled contracts, Blackwater Worldwide, the private security firm known for its mercenary work in Iraq and Afghanistan, has changed its name to Xe (pronounced "zee").

The company announced this linguistic detoxification after the U.S. State Department refused to renew its contract to protect diplomats in Iraq. On March 2, Blackwater founder Erik Prince resigned as CEO, a move that followed the recent departures of the vice chairman, chief operating officer, president and executive vice president.

In late January, the Iraqi government denied Blackwater a new operating license, after unsuccessfully trying to get the company out of its country since September 2007, when several Blackwater guards

killed 17 unarmed Iraqis and wounded 20 more in a crowded Baghdad intersection.

Company spokeswoman Anne Tyrrell told news organizations that Blackwater's controversies are now in the past. "[The company's Iraq legacy] is an aspect of our work that we feel we were defined by," Tyrrell told the Associated Press, which broke news of the name change on Feb. 13.

On Feb. 14, she told the *Washington Post*, "The idea is to define the company as what it is today and not what it used to be."

A re-branding effort like this is a desperate measure, says Anne Landman, an editor at the Center for Media and Democracy in Madison, Wis.

"It usually means a company is in pretty deep yogurt," Landman says. "When they do that, they're confronted on all fronts: legal problems, public relations problems, how they're portrayed in the media. They need to jump out of their old skin and into a new one, and hope that we don't notice."

As for the name "Xe," Tyrrell tells *In*

These Times that "it holds no special significance. ... We thought it had the best potential for brand identity."

A new name and logo isn't a novel idea for the North Carolina-based Blackwater, which in October 2007 had changed its name to Blackwater Worldwide from Blackwater USA, and removed the crosshairs on its bear-claw logo in an attempt to soften its image.

But those changes did nothing to quell the public uproar against the company.

Tyrrell tells *In These Times* that the company will "return to our roots" of military and law enforcement training. She says Blackwater "never wanted to be in the business of private security." But former company President Gary Jackson told the *New York Times* in 2004, "I would like to have the largest, most professional private army in the world."

Blackwater guards still operate in Afghanistan and Iraq.

When asked how many guards Xe currently has in Afghanistan, Tyrrell says, "I can say it's less than the largest number we've had in Iraq ... less than a thousand."

When pressed if it was more than 100, she laughs, saying, "I don't know. And I probably wouldn't tell you if I did."

After its Iraq contract ends in May, Blackwater will likely still have guards in the country.

Since the company has long maintained that its guards are not its own employees, but are instead independent State Department contractors, former Blackwater guards could stay in Iraq by working with Triple Canopy or DynCorp, two private security firms that have valid contracts.

Vague definitions and loopholes in U.S. and Iraqi law could allow guards to continue to act with impunity.

The U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement, ratified by the Iraqi parliament in late 2008, sought to bring independent contractors under its jurisdiction, but "does not seem to cover State Department contractors," says Jon Tracy, assistant director of the nonprofit National Institute of Military Justice. "Based on the definition of 'contractors' in the agreement, it only covers those that are contracted by the U.S. military."

—Joel Handley

TO BOYCOTT ISRAEL...OR NOT?

Naomi Klein and Rabbi Arthur Waskow debate whether divestment will bring peace to the Middle East

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS



On Jan. 23, a family stands by a burning fire where their home once stood in a Gaza City neighborhood heavily damaged by Israeli troops.

SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

At the height of the war in Gaza, author Naomi Klein endorsed the campaign known as Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). A coalition of Palestinian groups founded the BDS movement on July 9, 2005, as a way for the international community to put pressure

on Israel to reach a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians.

In her syndicated column, Klein wrote, "It's time. Long past time. The best strategy to end the increasingly bloody occupation is for Israel to become the target of

the kind of global movement that put an end to apartheid in South Africa."

Klein, author of the best selling books, *The Shock Doctrine* and *No Logo*, has taken heat for her position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Israel is always

more emotionally difficult for me," she told *New Voices*, a national Jewish student magazine, "I think mainly it's because of the force of the reaction and the closeness [of the] reaction. It's not a stranger that is upset about [what I write], it's people in my family who write me long letters saying, 'Oh, I hate you!'"

Similar strong feelings are on display at Hampshire College, which has been debating whether it should divest from companies that do business in Israel. Hampshire's Students for Justice in Palestine wants its college to divest from companies like Caterpillar, General Electric, Motorola and United Technologies. In



LUBOB SCHLOSS, (R) ED KASHI

Rabbi Arthur Waskow and Naomi Klein differ on the best approach to peace.

response, Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz has threatened to lead a divestment campaign against Hampshire College if the administration gives in to the students' demands.

Is BDS the right response? Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a contributing editor of *Ramparts* and a former fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, says that the BDS campaign will not work. He maintains that significant differences exist between the political situation in apartheid-era South Africa and present-day Israel.

In 1969, Waskow began campaigning for a two-state peace settlement between Israel and Palestine. He is co-author of *The Tent of Abraham: Stories of Hope and Peace for Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. Currently, he is the director of the Shalom Center, a Philadelphia-based organization that he describes as "a prophetic voice in Jewish, multi-religious, and American life that brings Jewish and other spiritual thought and practice to bear on seeking peace, pursuing justice, healing the earth, and celebrating community."

Recently, Klein and Waskow spoke with *In These Times* about the efficacy of the BDS strategy.

Naomi, won't your BDS proposal simply strengthen the position of Israeli nationalists, who will then be able to turn to moderates and say, "We are under attack!"

NAOMI KLEIN: The hard right seems to be strengthening all on its own, if we judge by the results of the recent Israeli elections.

But I've noticed a change within Israel. I got quite a few e-mails from Israelis saying, "I've always opposed this, but I feel that it is the only option left." I think that's a reflection of the feeling of desperation among progressive Israelis who are watching their country move hard right and seeing the level of violence increase exponentially.

Arthur, you were an anti-apartheid activist who supported a BDS approach to South Africa. Are there similarities between the Bantustans, the small areas of South Africa that were under "independent" black rule, and the Occupied Territories?

RABBI ARTHUR WASKOW: There are similarities, but the BDS approach is not the way to bring about the change that is absolutely necessary.

The most important, and probably the

only effective, change that can be brought about is a serious change in the behavior of the U.S. government. That means we need to engage in serious organizing within the United States.

Naomi has written about the failure of carrots in changing the way Israel has behaved so far, and I agree. One carrot the Israeli government has essentially ignored, with the help of the Bush administration, is the offer of the Arab League, led by a surprisingly creative King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. It outlines a general peace treaty between Israel and all the Arab states, on the condition of a peace treaty being negotiated between Israel and a viable, sensible Palestinian state with perhaps some variations on the 1967 boundaries.

But the Israeli government of the last 10 years has been totally uninterested because it thought it could get away with de facto annexing more and more land of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

If the U.S. government had said, "Here's the deal: the Arab League proposal is what we are after, and we will offer carrots and we will offer sticks, whatever is necessary to bring this about." Then there would be very serious change, both within the Palestinian territories and Israel.

Real political change within the United States could come through an Abrahamic Alliance, an alliance between big chunks—though, of course, not all—of the Jewish community, the Muslim community, and the Christians.

Boycotts and divestment are not going to do it. I understand that they express a kind of personal purity—"not with my money you don't"—but they won't change U.S. policy, which is exactly what needs to be changed.

NK: It is not a question of personal purity. It's a question of basic solidarity. A call for this tactic has come from coalitions of Palestinian groups representing a very wide spectrum of political parties, labor unions and community groups.

Interestingly, the country which has responded the most seriously to the BDS movement is South Africa, precisely because the parallels are seen most clearly in South Africa.

A lot of this criticism of the BDS movement has been: Why Israel? Why not Sri

Lanka? And the point is that, according to basic left principles of solidarity, the tactics should be chosen by the oppressed communities themselves.

In terms of the ultimate solution and what that should be, BDS and Arthur's calls for an Abrahamic Alliance are not incompatible goals. I think that really what we're talking about is how you build pressure toward a resolution.

AW: But Naomi, something different is going on inside Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian society than what was going on within white South Africa. Leaving aside the fact that in Israel, about a fifth of the population with some voting power is Israeli Palestinians, within Jewish Israel there is a real internal split.

Even though during the last election Israelis moved to the hard right, a serious body of people is still working for a two-state solution. And the only force in the world that can deliver that is the United States government.

You're right that many Palestinians have called for divestment, etc., but I disagree that the oppressed automatically get to decide their own tactics. For example, Hamas made a terrible ethical and practical political mistake by responding to the embargo and blockade on Gaza with rocket attacks on civilians in Israel.

I recognize that there had to be resis-

tance, but there were nonviolent alternatives. There were beginning to be "ship-ins," in the model of sit-ins. Small boats that had been certified as not carrying any weapons, began to cross the Mediterranean carrying medicine and food, especially baby food, to civilians in Gaza. The first couple got through, but then beginning with the massive attack on Gaza, the Israeli navy forced others back.

NK: They rammed one and may have fired shots at another.

AW: Yes. Now, the question is, what would have happened if the Palestinian leadership, including Hamas, had said to Europeans and to Americans, "We welcome this vigorous, assertive, non-violent resistance to the blockade. We beg for doctors and peaceniks and academics and everybody under the sun to start joining in and bringing these boats, and we appeal for pastors and priests and rabbis and imams to start coming in these boats." In fact, there was a mass public welcome of the first boats that got through.

But Hamas did not choose that response. Rather they shot rockets into civilian neighborhoods, which is both ineffective and unethical.

NK: Let me clarify. I don't believe any oppressed community deserves blind support for its tactics. But it's precisely because

there has been so much blanket criticism of any Palestinian armed resistance that I think there is an added responsibility to respect calls for nonviolent solidarity actions like BDS, which are the most effective tactics in the nonviolent arsenal.

AW: But the question is, "What will work?" And when you say what the tactics could be, I agree that sanctions are a thousand times better than shooting rockets at civilian neighborhoods, but they don't work. The nonviolent tactic of the ship-ins was direct, visible, and could've become a massive event. It would've been as direct a challenge to the blockade as the sit-ins in the restaurants were to American segregation.

The sit-ins in the American South were extraordinary because people didn't say, "Pass a new law to end segregation." They said, "We ourselves are going to end segregation. We imagine the future without segregation, we're going to do it, and then you all are going to have to decide what to do with us. Kill us or change the law." So that was extraordinarily effective. For me, the question is, "How do you create that kind of change?"

The Presbyterians and a few other Protestant groups broached the question of divestment from Caterpillar, which was producing the bulldozers that were knocking down Palestinian houses. I told the Presbyterians, "This is a waste of time. What would work would be if you all decided that every Presbyterian Church in America was going to bring an Israeli and a Palestinian at the same time to lay out the Geneva Initiative for a two-state peace treaty and the Presbyterian Church was going to commit itself to lobbying for that with the Congress and the president." That would've been incredibly effective, and still would be, if the churches and some Jews and some Muslims got together on this.

NK: I think those are wonderfully complementary strategies. This problem is going to take everything we've got. And that's why I'm so resistant to taking such powerful tactics as BDS off the table at such a crucial moment. The U.S. government was hardly a world leader when it came to sanctions against South Africa. But when universities and municipalities joined the sanctions movement, it even-



On Jan. 22, Zenat Abdallah Al-Samoni, 35, sits on the rubble of her destroyed home in Gaza City, while her son Nour looks on. She lost her husband and 4-year-old child during the recent Israeli attacks.

ABID KATIB/GETTY IMAGES

tually forced the federal government to get with the program.

I support the BDS strategy for Israel because it will work again, and it will work because it cuts to the heart of something that is so important to so many Israelis. And that is the idea of normalcy, the idea that Israel is really an honorary adjunct to North America and Europe—even though it happens to be located in the Middle East.

At the moment, it is possible to lead a very comfortable, very secure, very cosmopolitan life in most parts of Israel—despite the fact that Israel is at war with neighbors. I don't think Israel has a right to simultaneously rain bombs and missiles on Gaza, to attack Lebanon in 2006, to massively expand the settlements, and also have this state of normalcy within its borders. For justice to come, the status quo will have to first become uncomfortable.

When concerts are canceled in Tel Aviv, when tourists don't come to Israel, then, I believe, many Israelis will start putting pressure on their political leaders to finally negotiate a lasting peace. So I don't buy the argument that they'll just feel isolated and become more right wing. The threat of isolation can be a very powerful tool for progressive change in a country like Israel.

Naomi, Helen Suzman, a white South African who was a leader of the anti-apartheid movement, who died this past Jan-

uary, argued that economic sanctions against South Africa during apartheid had hurt the entire population, particularly the poor. Would not the same thing happen in the occupied territories?

NK: It is true that in South Africa it did hurt the entire population. And the call for sanctions was consciously made despite that fact. And that is why it is so extraordinary, that there has been such a widespread call from Palestinians despite the fact that they will also suffer under BDS.

But we can't compare the kind of suffering Gazans are facing under the Israeli blockade and embargo to what Israelis would suffer if a BDS campaign were to get off the ground. We're talking about people in Gaza lacking life-saving medicine, cooking oil and food, versus Israel losing some foreign investment, and not having concerts and some academic conferences. These are not in the same league.

AW: Naomi, you said you see them as complementary strategies, but in the real world, people have to decide what to put their energies into. Do we think that if the Presbyterian church is trying to put its energies into boycotts this time, not just of Caterpillar but of all Israeli society, that that's going to be workable alongside of, and at the same time as, mobilizing Israeli and Palestinian voices simultaneously in those churches, and then those

churches lobbying Congress on these solutions? I don't believe it.

NK: That is what happened with South Africa. The BDS strategy personalizes the dispute. You follow the money at your own school, your own shopping habits, your own government, and extraordinarily lively debates ensue that are not just about the boycott strategy but are about why the boycott is happening. That's happening right now at Hampshire College.

The boycott starts the debate, it brings teeth to it so you're not just signing yet another statement that can be ignored. Or bringing together like-minded people to listen to another speaker or dialogue.

And that's the dynamic that BDS promises. Just as in South Africa, where you had a lot of industry saying to the apartheid regime, "We can't live with this any longer," we would have that dynamic within Israel.

AW: But there is a huge difference between South Africa and Israel. In South Africa, the U.S. government was not pouring billions of dollars into the country. Whereas, in the case of Israel, the U.S. government is. That support seems to me to be far more the point.

The likelihood of Israelis saying, "Wait a minute, this is a serious problem," is going to be much greater if the Obama administration says: "Here's the deal. There's going to be an emergency peace conference in the Middle East. It's going to come out with a Palestinian state that's really independent, not chopped up in little bits, and there will be a peace treaty with all the Arab states." I can see the possibility of a whole new American outlook making peace in the Middle East.

NK: Once again, the question is how do we get to the point where the Obama administration feels the need to get tough and say, "Here's the deal." I don't believe that mere dialogue will bring us there. I'm arguing that BDS is a fantastic movement-building tool precisely because it is a conversation starter; it ignites the debate. It makes the conflict personal in the same way as the amazing grassroots movement we had in the '80s against South Africa did in the United States. It is only once those debates are raging that there will be the kind of bottom-up pres-



Left-wing Israelis and Israeli Arabs call for an immediate end to the war in Gaza as they demonstrate Jan. 17, in Tel Aviv.

DAVID SILVERMAN/GETTY IMAGES

sure on Obama that could lead to a real shift in U.S. policy.

AW: Yes, there needs to be a real life, day-by-day connection to making change happen. But from my point of view, if you could bring Muslims and Jews and Christians together, meeting each other, talking to each other, getting past the fear and stereotypes about each other, if you could get that happening, that would be a piece

You can't do now what was done in the 1970s to the first American Jewish organization to talk about a two-state solution, Breira, which got killed by attacks from the center as well as the right wing of Jewish institutional life. That's not working this time.

NK: While I understand that the Jewish community is finding voices that are more diverse, we have to be clear that this is not

all carrots all the time, and introducing any sticks at all would represent real progress. Also I think BDS does embody the future, because it says that Palestinian lives matter deeply. There is such an asymmetry of outrage on this issue—the uproar about Israeli universities facing a boycott at the same time as Palestinian schools and universities are being bombed, for instance. When

'I DON'T ATTACK BDS AS UNETHICAL. I'M SAYING IT WON'T WORK. BUT IT DOES HAVE ONE MAJOR ETHICAL DEFECT, WHICH IS IT DOESN'T EMBODY THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT, A FUTURE OF PEACE WITH ALL ARAB STATES.'

of the future the way the sit-ins were a piece of the future.

The way to build the movement in the United States is for the people who are here to build a movement among themselves. A big chunk of the unrepresented Jewish population in the United States—somewhere between half and two-thirds of it—agree that there needs to be a two-state solution. Their institutions either don't agree or won't do much about it.

Arthur, during the war on Gaza, J Street, which is a new "pro-peace, pro-Israel" group, posted an editorial on its website stating, "We recognize that neither Israelis nor Palestinians have a monopoly on right or wrong."

In response, Noah Pollack, on the *Commentary* magazine blog, wrote, "It is time that thinking people start calling J Street what it actually is: an anti-Israeli group." What is it about Israeli politics that makes it so difficult to discuss?

AW: Well of course *Commentary* would say that. But it's not difficult to discuss. In fact, J Street has gone right on and continued speaking out.

Much more to the point, and much more upsetting, was that Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, wrote an op-ed in the *Forward* condemning J Street, saying that J Street's "words are deeply distressing because they are morally deficient, profoundly out of touch with Jewish sentiment and also appallingly naive." He represents, in theory, a million Jews. But it didn't kill J Street.

just a Jewish issue. And maybe it shouldn't even be Jews who lead this issue. In Europe, it isn't just Jews who are leading this issue.

AW: Well, the other difference between Europe and the United States is that in Europe, the Jewish community, for reasons of history 75 years ago, doesn't have much political clout. In the United States, the Jewish community does. So changing the Jewish community, building progressive organizations is both possible and necessary in the American Jewish community.

I don't attack BDS as unethical. I'm saying it won't work. But there is one major ethical defect to it, I think, which is that it doesn't embody the future in the present. The future it does not embody is the one most precious and most legitimate for Israel: peace with all the Arab states.

I agree that a policy of all carrots for Israel and all sticks for the Palestinians is both an ethical and practical disaster. But sticks-only for Israel won't and shouldn't work, and that's what the BDS approach feels like. Sometimes that works anyway—it did in South Africa. But it hasn't worked (and shouldn't) when used against Palestine—what stronger BDS could there be than the one against Gaza?—and it hasn't worked (and shouldn't be used) against Cuba.

In the United States around civil rights, it was embodying the future in the present that worked. What will and should work now is that One Big Carrot of peace, with sticks right behind it if an Israeli government rejects the carrot.

NK: First of all, Israel has received

we treat Israeli war crimes as deserving of international sanction, we are rejecting this double standard and embodying the future we want, which is a future of genuine equality.

AW: But what would have happened if Hampshire College had twinned itself with the university in Gaza and a university in Ramallah and had done its best to make real-life connections?

NK: Frankly, not as much as what is going to come of their bold BDS stance. At Hampshire College, there have been plenty of exchanges and dialogues of all kinds, but those don't change the economic and political dynamics of the conflict, which are what need changing.

AW: I agree that that is what needs changing, but I don't think this is the way to do it. I don't think we're going to agree on which set of tactics are best, but I guess people are going to have to make up their own minds. I do think we have to recognize that nothing is going to happen unless the policy of the United States changes.

NK: I agree with that. We just have a disagreement about how we get there. I think BDS changes the dynamic, because it inserts multiple other economic powers into the equation. It would put grassroots pressure on the Obama administration that could become hard to ignore. And also pressure within Israel. I certainly agree that it will piss off Israelis, but I also think we need to acknowledge that ignoring the call is an active position toward Palestinians, it's not a passive one. ■

Do-It-Yourself Governance

Without new social movements, there will be no new New Deal

BY ELIZABETH SANDERS

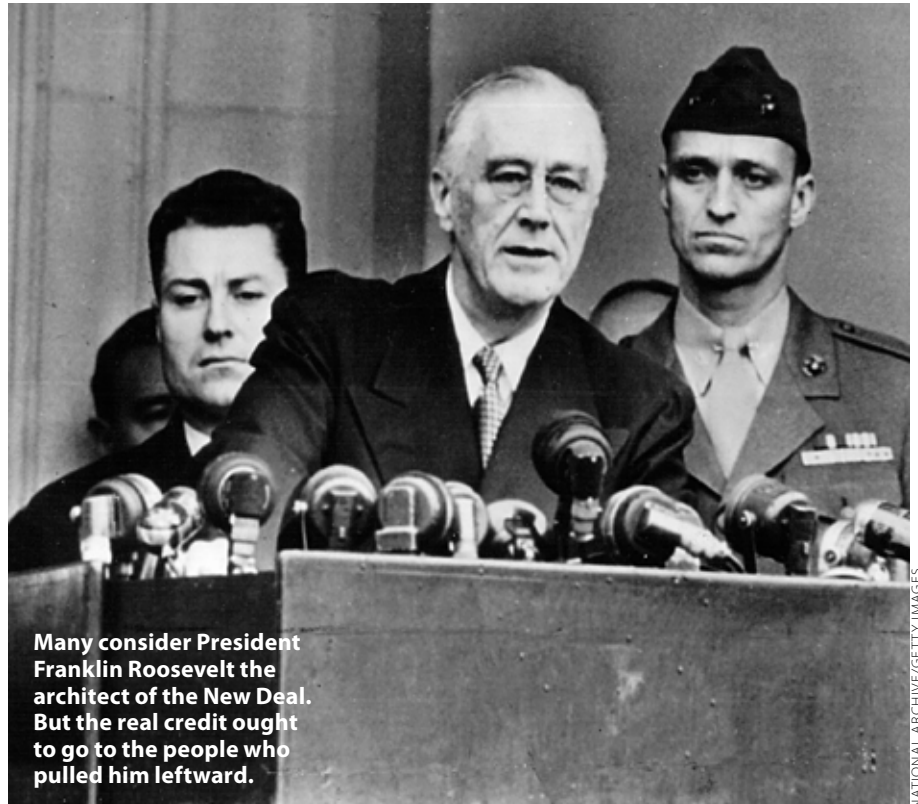
WHEN BARACK OBAMA BEGAN to run for his party's nomination two years ago, he could not have seen himself as the next Franklin Roosevelt, the founder of a new Democratic "regime" (to use Yale political science professor Stephen Skowronek's term). More likely, Obama anticipated that, should he ultimately win the presidency, he would be what Skowronek labels a "pre-emptive" president, one who manages to be elected when his party does not dominate political philosophy or policy expectations, or have a sure place in the voters' hearts.

Recall that despite George W. Bush's dismal approval ratings, Obama and Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) were running neck and neck in the polls from mid-August through early September. Without the financial crisis, Obama may not have been assured electoral victory, much less a definitive Democratic sweep.

If Obama perceived his presidency as a Clintonian "pre-emption"—another round of triangulating that meant accepting the essential premises of the Reagan Revolution, assumed to still be strong despite the previous administration's abject failures—that would explain the ambiguity of his campaign appeals to "hope" and "change," minus a clear repudiation of Republicanism.

Obama seemed intent on reassuring the public that he was *not* a liberal Democrat, not a partisan of Rooseveltian regulation, taxation and big government. Even after his electoral victory, the reassurance game continued. The transition team and designated economic advisers represented a spectrum from former Clinton officials rightward.

His grassroots supporters grimaced as



Many consider President Franklin Roosevelt the architect of the New Deal. But the real credit ought to go to the people who pulled him leftward.

NATIONAL ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

architects of financial deregulation—including the many protégés of former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin (and Rubin himself), and the *bête noire* of President Carter's defeat, former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker—were designated as Obama's economic advisers. No economists like Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman or Robert Reich grace the administration's economic team. Furthermore, the administration chose a military officer and a Republican defense secretary to run its foreign policy, with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton hardly a dove herself.

The realm of realignment?

In 1933, Roosevelt's break with the old regime seemed more sure and sharp. He

did not bring the laissez-faire enthusiasts who created the Wall Street debacle onto a stage full of flags as a symbol of his commitment not to rock the boat. Roosevelt's "Brain Trust" was made up of college professors, not Wall Street operatives. Roosevelt was not shy about using the tax code as a mechanism for redistribution of wealth.

Six weeks into his presidency, however, Obama appears to be warming to the Roosevelt role. A new regime "reconstructor" (in Skowronek's theory of presidential challenge and limitation) enjoys an unusual window of opportunity. The old regime is discredited. Clearly its policies, philosophy and institutions have failed disastrously. The

public is ready to try something new. The opposition sputters and can think of no alternatives beyond its old nostrums (as demonstrated by Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal's GOP rebuttal to Obama's speech on Feb. 24).

Obama's speech was exhilarating in the manner of Roosevelt's speeches. He exuded confidence in a new path, repudiation of the old, and specificity in the foci of the programs he would sponsor to get the country moving again.

"[T]hough we are living through difficult and uncertain times," Obama said, "tonight I want every American to know this: We will rebuild, we will recover, and the United States of America will emerge stronger than before."

Does this mean, then, that American politics is again in the realm of realignment, of the generational sea change associated with the elections of Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Roosevelt and Reagan? There is a good possibility, but it rests on two conditions that are not at all certain to occur:

The first is a confident experimentation in the White House—in league with Congress—that leads, ultimately, to success. The second is the mobilization of social movements.

For the first to occur, it would mean that within two years (at least by the time of the midterm elections that have always signaled realignment), the economy would need to experience definite improvement.

New regimes bury their failed predecessors through the reconstruction of memory, the invention of a persuasive narrative that paints the old regime's failures in the darkest hues, the new regime's successes in the brightest contrasts. Conservatives have been relatively successful in painting the New Deal as a failure. As the story is told (and economics majors on campuses across the nation can recite it in unison), the New Deal did not bring the country out of the Depression; only World War II did that.

One of the first *easy* tasks of the Democratic Party should be to set the record straight. Whether one consults the figures in Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz's *A Monetary History of the United States*,

or the graphs on Wikipedia's New Deal entry, the undeniable facts are that after 1933, employment, manufacturing output, per capita income and gross domestic product all headed sharply up (except for the dip in 1937 when FDR, once re-elected, briefly abandoned his own stimulus program).

Economic historian Elliot Rosen, no

demands and expertise of congressional progressives from both parties.

It takes a Congress

In his diary, New Deal Interior Secretary Harold Ickes tells the story of a mid-May, 1935, visit to the White House from a group of congressional movers and shakers, anxious about the wan-

While most accounts of the New Deal recovery efforts emphasize short-term jobs programs, we should remember the long-term contributions of education, family security and infrastructure.

more eager than Friedman to credit the New Deal's recovery programs with emergence from the Depression, nevertheless provides a persuasive empirical disputation of the canard it was only World War II that buried the Depression. Rosen focuses instead on the creation of physical and human infrastructure that laid the foundation for post-war technological advances. While most accounts of the New Deal recovery efforts emphasize the short-term employment programs, it is well to remember the long-term contribution of education, family security and the infrastructure of roads, bridges, schools and electric lines to economic growth.

Just as important, the New Deal's regulatory structure contributed to steady economic growth, before Reagan began in earnest to dismantle it through neoliberal appointments and lax enforcement. In his reconstruction effort, Obama will have the assistance of Congress, as did Roosevelt in his first two terms. In fact, it was Congress that compelled FDR to leave the gold standard, overcome the crippling currency deflation policies of the Federal Reserve Board, regulate banks and securities trading, invest in public power and rural electrification and create a new system of labor relations.

The most successful and lasting of New Deal economic experiments, usually portrayed as inside-the-White-House phenomena, were actually rooted in the

ing energy and lack of direction in the White House.

At the time, banking reform, securities regulation and the Home Owners Loan Corporation were helping to stabilize the financial system, and public works job programs offered employment to millions.

But Roosevelt's corporatist National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) experiment was sputtering, even before the Supreme Court struck it down in late May, and his other centerpiece, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was helping mostly the largest farmers. Struggling middle-class Americans, their modest savings nearly exhausted, were tuning in their radios to flamboyant critics of the administration's timidity, like Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin. Roosevelt seemed out of ideas.

But Congress was not. It had a labor relations bill, an anti-monopoly bill, pacifist bills to control the munitions trade. And Congress was increasingly drawn to simple, direct solutions to the poverty of the elderly and World War I veterans—programs that would simply mail out government checks and replace the "trickle down" strategy of the NIRA and AAA with a bottom up anti-depression strategy. If the administration would not act, Congress would.

Congress unfurled its flag by passing (again) a Veterans' Bonus bill, and it almost succeeded in overriding

Roosevelt's veto in the early summer of 1935. If the president would not act more aggressively, Congress would enact its own "shadow" New Deal program.

Finally, the president did act. In 1935, he called Congress back into session in the summer to pass the remarkable spate of legislation we know as the "second New Deal." It brought forth a five-part Social Security Act, a National Labor Relations Act, a greatly expanded Works Progress Administration, a Holding Company Act that broke up utility monopolies, an act to control the export of weapons, a restructuring of the Federal Reserve System, and a bill to raise taxes on the rich. It was an amazing production, and it cinched Roosevelt's re-election.

This, then, is the essential condition for pulling a president off the center-right, and toward the needs and demands of ordinary Americans: If the president flags, Congress must be active, and ready to come up with its own programs for recovery.

Calling all social movements

But to get Congress to act, something else is needed: dynamic social movements. It is clear that Congress in the 1930s was responding to at least six organized and energetic movements.

Maverick Sen. Huey Long's (D-La.) Share Our Wealth program had the fantastic but wildly popular proposal that government simply give every American family a check in the mail annually—about \$3,000—so that all families could own a home, car, radio and other life essentials. Then there was the Townsend movement to give every person 65 or older a monthly check for \$200, on the simple condition that they spend it all before the month was out.

In the same vein, the Veterans' Bonus movement demanded that World War I veterans, a large group of whom had twice marched on and camped out in Washington, D.C., be paid their promised bonuses early. The American Federation of Labor and the much more active and inclusive unions that created the Committee for Industrial Organization demanded a national legal framework to

facilitate unionization.

Radio priest Father Coughlin, though increasingly unstable, was a fierce critic of both the conservatism and the power-centralizing tendencies of the early New Deal, and his followers, centered among Midwestern Catholic workers and lower middle classes, might be loosely called a "movement."

Local and national movements pulled Congress and President Roosevelt to the left. They deserve much of the credit for the New Deal's successes in reversing the Depression spiral.

Finally, peace groups were extremely active in communicating information about the causes and prevention of war, and lobbying Congress to investigate war profiteering in the First World War and to pass measures for disarmament negotiations, control of the munitions trade and more drastic war prevention measures.

Below the national level, the movement led by Upton Sinclair to End Poverty in California (EPIC) championed its own solutions for the Depression that were far more radical than Roosevelt's.

These movements pulled Congress and the president to the left. They deserve much credit for the New Deal's successes in reversing the Depression spiral and creating lasting institutions for financial stability, economic growth and economic security.

If Obama's conservative economic advisers are to formulate programs of benefit to Main Street rather than Wall Street, it will take movement activism to propel them in that direction, and to counter the inevitable attacks from the right—while at the same time educating the public with information, argument and a framework that resonates with widely shared American values.

Throughout our history, it has been social movements (defined as organized and sustained collective action by people outside formal centers of power to press their grievances on the state) that have

made public officials accountable and broadly responsive.

Without the abolition movement, President Lincoln would have resisted freeing the slaves, and Congress might not have tried to secure their citizenship rights in the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments.

In fact, the well-heeled fellows who

drafted the Constitution at Philadelphia in 1787 would not have combined that limited text with the Bill of Rights that established essential democratic freedoms had it not been for that first national social movement, the Anti-Federalists.

President Woodrow Wilson would not have supported a women's suffrage amendment had the movement not reached a threshold size that made its block of votes attractive for Wilson's very close reelection contest in 1916.

And farmer and labor movements of that period pressed Congress and the president for an outpouring of legislation that came to be called the Progressive Era. Following the 1930s, social movements gave us landmark civil rights laws, women's rights, environmental protection and, finally, an end to the Vietnam War.

Presidents come in all shapes and sizes, from the bumbling to the inspired to the tortured souls who do great harm. But the temptations to mask a minimally responsive program in grand rhetoric, to throw in their lot with the wealthy who fund their campaigns and control so many resources, or to abandon domestic policy struggles for the short term empowerment and rally effect of war making—these are institutional pathologies that will tempt even the most angelic of presidents.

Which is to say, if we want a *new* New Deal, we have to do it ourselves. ■

Uncertainty in Sudan

What will the International Criminal Court's indictment of President Bashir mean for the future of Sudan?

BY STEVEN FAKE AND KEVIN FUNK



On March 4, protesters who were campaigning for the indictment of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir demonstrate outside the Sudanese embassy in London.

KHARTOUM, SUDAN—ALONG A DUSTY side street in downtown Khartoum, amid shadows of the imposing U.S. embassy and the clamor of the building boom that is remaking the Sudanese capital, sits one of the city's many unpretentious eateries. This particular shop features a banner with a smiling picture of President Barack Obama on the corner of the sign out front. In thick black letters, it reads "Opama."

The restaurant owner laments over the misspelling with a chuckle. The company he hired to make the banner made a mis-

take, he says, refusing to accept payment for two bottles of soda as a gesture of Sudanese hospitality toward foreigners.

He expressed hope that Obama would make substantive changes in U.S. foreign policy, and toward Sudan more specifically.

This sentiment of hope is common among the Sudanese people, whose country has seen more than six years of violent conflict in the western region of Darfur. What began as a rebellion against marginalization of the underdeveloped periphery quickly transformed into a lethal conflict as the government respond-

ed by bombing villages and unleashing militias that raped and killed indiscriminately, forcing millions of people to flee their homeland.

Some Sudanese even celebrate Obama as one of their own, affirming that his father's Kenyan tribe has its origins in Sudan.

But the policy positions staked out by key figures in the Obama administration have largely escaped careful scrutiny. As then-chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Vice President Joseph Biden made a call to "use American force now" in Sudan. And Susan Rice, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, has ad-



In the capital city of Khartoum, signs like this one signal Sudan's warming attitudes toward the United States.

vocated for support for a “humanitarian intervention” in the country. But little has been said about what an Obama administration plans to do in the days ahead.

Misplaced sanctions?

In 1997, the Clinton administration implemented sanctions against Sudan, accusing the country of sponsoring terrorism. As a result, no trade exists between the two countries, nor are U.S. companies permitted to invest in Sudan—including in its booming oil industry.

While the Sudanese government’s reprehensible arming of militias to carry out mass killings in Darfur has led to broad support for these sanctions among U.S. progressives, the measure is having harmful effects on the people, according to many Sudanese.

Mohamed Elgadi, 56, a Sudanese activist now living in the United States, is critical of Khartoum, but he says the sanctions are working “against the oppressed not the oppressors.” A member of the Western Massachusetts Darfur Coalition, Elgadi says he recalls the impact the U.S. sanctions had against Iraq, weakening opposition to the regime while “Saddam and his gang continued to enjoy the same luxurious life,” he says.

To more accurately target the government, Elgadi proposes scrapping Darfur

Plan B, which the Bush administration implemented in May 2007 to deny an additional 31 Khartoum-affiliated companies access to the U.S. financial system and freeze the assets of three individuals implicated in the conflict. But this approach did not focus on such key officials and U.S. allies like Sudanese intelligence head Salah Gosh.

Instead, Elgadi suggests the U.S. government “freeze the economic assets of all the regime’s leaders and their families, including those of both Islamist parties ... [and] ban travel visas to the regime’s leaders.”

This plan could allay the concerns of those who support sanctions as a means of registering their disgust with Khartoum. In a Cairo café, we spoke with Fareed (not his real name), 30, a former aid worker from South Darfur who currently lives in Egypt. He says the sanctions should continue and asserts that the majority of Darfuris support the measure so long as people are unable to return to their homes or have access to adequate education and healthcare.

If the United States ended sanctions, Fareed says, “The government of Sudan [would] think that they are strong and ... won the battle” against Washington.

A plan such as the one Elgadi proposes could not only be more effective in changing Khartoum’s policies, but could

also enjoy strong backing from many Sudanese, including many Darfuris.

The China-Sudan alliance

With development projects springing up in the capital, many Sudanese sound baffled when asked about sanctions. The economic boom has mainly been a result of the strong partnership between Sudan and China, an alliance that has undermined whatever effectiveness the U.S. sanctions might have had on Khartoum.

Though Beijing mostly keeps a low profile in Sudan, the China National Petroleum Corporation’s headquarters is in downtown Khartoum, along a privileged stretch of the Blue Nile and a short distance away from government buildings. A few blocks down the street sits the Chinese-built Friendship Hall, an expansive convention center.

While many Western commentators are critical of the China-Sudan alliance, those on the ground—even those critical of the Sudanese government—express a wider range of viewpoints.

One such critic, a retired Sudanese ambassador and opponent of the governing Omar Hassan al-Bashir regime, begrudgingly accepts China’s role in Sudan, saying the “relationship remains a cornerstone for Sudan’s survival, economically and diplomatically, under the current circumstances.”

However, the Sudanese left is not convinced of the benefits of Khartoum’s close relationship with Beijing.

“China is seen as the new colonizer in Sudan and the whole [of] Africa,” says Elgadi. “I see them as no different from [the] Reagan administration when it sided with the former [Sudanese] dictator [Jaafar] Nimeiri.”

Nimeiri was responsible for provoking the renewal of the civil war with the south that claimed as many as 2 million lives from 1983 to 2005. During this conflict, he armed militias to attack tribes identified with the southern rebels, resulting in atrocities and a counterinsurgency that now repeat themselves in Darfur. Back then, U.S. aid poured into Sudan, leading one Sudanese official to speak of an “air bridge” of weaponry from Washington to Khartoum, used to violently suppress the

rebellion.

Elgadi says China has been backing President Bashir's regime since 1989. Most notably, China has a flourishing arms trade with Sudan, and currently buys an estimated 60 percent of Khartoum's substantial oil exports.

"It did not protest any of the massacres committed by the regime in the south or the Nuba Mountains," says Elgadi, referring to the region in central Sudan where the government waged a genocidal campaign against its people in 1992. "Not to mention Darfur. The worst thing [is that] most of the oil revenue went back to [China through] weapons deals," he says.

ICC showdown

Although China has extended diplomatic cover to Khartoum, it has not been able to protect the Bashir government from the International Criminal Court (ICC). On March 4, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in directing the government counterinsurgency campaign that led to the atrocities in Darfur. It marks the first time the ICC has brought criminal charges against a sitting head of state.

The impact of the indictment—as well as the many come-and-gone deadlines for issuing it—has left Khartoum in a tense, expectant atmosphere for months. Some, like the retired ambassador, warn the arrest could provoke violence.

"It could jeopardize the [2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between the north and south] and the prospects for peace in Darfur," he says. By contrast, many Darfuris say they plan to celebrate such an event, not surprising given Khartoum's brutality against the people of this region.

Speaking before the indictment was handed down, Mohamed Ali Saeed, 70, a journalist formerly with Agence France-Presse, predicted that Khartoum "will certainly witness huge demonstrations" if the arrest warrant is issued, but says he doubts that the government "would dare confront and antagonize the entire international community" by expelling peacekeepers, as it has hinted it would do. Khartoum did, however, expel 10 humanitarian organizations on the day of the ICC ruling.

Saeed notes that "for survival of the regime, some people speculate that senior Islamists—possibly including Vice President Ali Osman Taha, within the ruling NCP [National Congress Party]—might somehow get rid of Bashir."

Moneim Howeris, 52, a Sudanese consultant and activist living in Scotland,

is made harder by the multiplicity of the rebel groups," he says, "which have turned down attempts [at unification] by regional leaders."

In fact, there are now an estimated 30 rebel groups in Darfur. But forging unified positions among them has made the possibility for a peace agreement in Dar-

Outside of Darfur, Sudanese opposition movements are weak. As a result, the outcome of the upcoming national elections is far from obvious—despite the ruling party's unpopularity.

says that after the initial furor passes, "everything [will] calm down, leaving the regime exposed to mounting pressures from the West to give real concessions in return [for] freezing the arrest warrant."

Some, such as Elgadi, say that in such a case, Bashir will be either choose to go into exile, or will be overthrown in a military coup. "He's finished," Elgadi declares.

Life after Bashir

The use of an ICC arrest warrant to pressure Khartoum is complicated by the fact that outside of Darfur, Sudanese opposition movements are weak. As a result, the outcome of the national elections slated for later this year is far from obvious, despite the ruling party's unpopularity.

"The main rival parties—like the Umma and the Democratic Union—have split into several factions and it is unlikely that they would pose a formidable challenge to the Islamist NCP," says Saeed. "The leftist parties, including the Communists ... have been totally inactive during the last two decades. The Communist Party was able to hold its general conference only last month," its first since 1967.

This stands in contrast to Sudan's proud history of strong labor and leftist movements, particularly in their heyday four decades ago. In fact, Sudan was once home to one of the strongest communist parties in the world before Nimeiri's 1971 campaign of repression.

The prospects for peace in Darfur are "gloomy," according to Saeed. "The difficulty of reaching an end to the conflict

fur more difficult. Elgadi calls for trying the criminal perpetrators of Darfur and for compensating the victims.

"Justice is a very important element of ending the conflict," Fareed says, "because the [victims] want to see the criminals in jail."

A role for Western activists

The retired ambassador says activists across the world must push their governments to lobby for "all movements in Darfur [to] participate in the peace talks," using as a model the generally successful 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between north and south Sudan.

That agreement was concluded after neighboring countries and key foreign powers—notably the United States—made a push for peace and facilitated negotiations. The resulting accord granted the south a percentage of the oil revenues and scheduled a referendum on autonomy for 2011. The CPA "would have not been achieved without such concerted Western pressure on both sides," says the ambassador.

The West ought to be "joining hands with Sudanese civic societies inside the country who are working under difficult conditions," says Howeris, the Scotland-based consultant. He suggests taking their lead—particularly the lead of Sudanese leftist and opposition movements—instead of imposing so-called solutions from outside.

As Elgadi says: "How on earth do you take a position on a country without consulting with comrades in that country?" ■

Give CEO Pay the Pink Slip

Capping outsized salaries is the first step toward creating responsible corporations

BY DAVID MOBERG

NEARLY EVERYONE IS ANGRY about excessive corporate executive pay these days, from laid-off autoworkers and foreclosed homeowners to former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker.

At the seven biggest financial firms that have recently failed, been sold or been bailed out, top executives have received \$464 million in “performance pay” since 2005. And these are the same people who helped create the conditions that led to the worldwide crash. For example, in December 2008, Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain—paid \$83 million in 2007—gave out \$3.6 billion in early executive bonuses before his firm was taken over by Bank of America, which has received \$45 billion in federal bailout money.

In February, in discussing the \$500,000 salary cap with limitations on golden parachutes, Obama said, “What gets people upset—and rightfully so—are executives being rewarded for failure. Especially when those rewards are subsidized by U.S. taxpayers.”

In 1980, CEOs at Fortune 500 firms were paid 42 times the average worker’s salary. By 2007, they were being paid on average 364 times as much.

During the most recent expansion from 2002 to 2006, for example, the top 1 percent of taxpayers took three-fourths of all income growth, according to University of California-Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez. And much of it, he says, was due to “an explosion of top wages and salaries.”

Apologists for CEOs argue that companies bid up salaries to get the best executives, who then boost profits and stock value. The cult of the heroic executive imagines that these Lone Rangers solely determine how fast and profitably a firm

grows, not the thousands of workers—from secretaries to engineers—doing their daily jobs.

But the differences in performance among executives are tiny—merely 0.016 percent between the performance of the top CEO and the 250th ranked, according to economists Xavier Gabaix of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Augustin Landier of New York University.

Gabaix and Landier claim the sixfold growth of CEO pay from 1980 to 2003 tracks the growth of corporate stock market value. But Princeton economist Uwe Reinhardt argues that most of this growth simply reflected the now-deflated general stock market boom, not the uniquely valuable talents of highly paid CEOs.

Indeed, scads of CEOs, like Robert Nardelli of Home Depot, reaped riches as their companies floundered. And overseas, CEOs of large, successful companies typi-

cally earn much less. From 2004-2006, top European CEOs received less than half of the \$13.3 million that their American counterparts made, on average; top Japanese CEOs received only \$1.5 million.

Supersized pay

The meltdown in the financial sector demonstrates that these executives had a talent not for strengthening their companies but for enriching themselves. And the public bank bailout has given legitimacy to demands that CEO pay be limited, as Obama modestly proposed for executives of companies that get federal help in the future.

But the public has a legitimate interest in all corporations and how much they pay executives, not just those it bails out. Government created and granted rights to corporations to serve the public interest, and government regulates corporate



Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain speaks at a press conference at Bank of America headquarters on Sept. 15, 2008 in New York City.

behavior when it affects the public, such as securities or environmental regulation. Why not CEO pay?

Many corporations rely on government contracts or financial assistance, and taxpayers provide \$20 billion a year in direct tax subsidies for excessive executive pay, according to a 2008 study from the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and United for a Fair Economy (UFFE).

“Average U.S. taxpayers subsidize excessive compensation—by more than \$20 billion per year,” the report says, “via a variety of tax and accounting loopholes. That \$20 billion for America’s most powerful is more than double what the federal government spent last year on educating America’s most vulnerable—children with disabilities.”

Supersized executive pay, especially in its typical form, is also a costly burden that distorts the economy away from the common good. It is a symptom of deeper problems with the way corporations and the economy are organized and regulated, argues AFL-CIO chief economist Ron Blackwell.

The foul smell of excess

In theory, corporations pay CEOs the stock options and other bonuses beyond their ample salaries to make sure that they have incentives to maximize shareholder value. But the system is rigged. Company managers effectively control corporate boards and are in collusion with the boards compensation advisers, says Harvard Law professor Lucian Bebchuck.

Society pays a high price for high salaries.

High executive pay contributes to rising inequality. The payouts for the top five executives at a typical corporation consume about 10 percent of aggregate corporate profits, according to Bebchuck. And at non-union companies, where wages are depressed, the CEOs make 20 percent more than at unionized companies, according to a 2007 survey published in the *Journal of Labor Research*.

Inequality takes its toll in many ways. It pushed most Americans deeper into debt as they tried to maintain living standards with stagnant incomes, thus weakening consumer demand as a prop for the economy. And it encouraged the rich to speculate. Consumer markets diverged to extremes: Wal-Marts with low-priced imports and luxury boutiques.

Growing inequality in a society increases illness and mortality among the less well off. It creates stress for individuals and tensions for society, thus undermining the ability of the nation to tackle major social issues—especially when inequality increases the political power of the wealthy.

And within a company, inequality undermines teamwork. As a result, argues New York University economics professor Edward Wolff, productivity is depressed, and firms invest less in human capital, or education and skills. That’s why the late management theorist Peter Drucker persistently argued that CEO pay should be no more than 25 times the average worker’s salary.

High executive compensation, especially stock options and bonuses, lead CEOs to take a short-term perspective, concludes Bebchuck. It gives them an incentive to quickly boost stock prices through tactics such as outsourcing, layoffs, research cutbacks, shortsighted sales or acquisitions of assets, and financial manipulation. At financial firms, executives sought riskier, higher-yield investments.

“The current economic crisis is a direct outcome of the compensation system,” Wolff says.

The compensation system encourages executives to focus on extracting wealth from the rest of the economy, not creating social wealth for the long haul. It distorts the economy, diverting talent from productive to unproductive work: the mathematicians and physicists lured into investment banking could have been working more usefully on research, such as helping build a sustainable energy economy.

As the late economist David Gordon argued, American corporations are less competitive and less productive than their European and Japanese counterparts due to the burden of an oversized corporate bureaucracy. That bureaucracy reflects a corporate strategy of treating workers as costs to be controlled, not essential contributors to corporate success.

Josh Bivens, an economist at the progressive Economic Policy Institute, argues in a new study that unions and blue-collar wages are not hurting U.S. manufacturing, but high corporate salaries are (along with an overvalued currency and dysfunctional healthcare system).

A new corporate contract

Giving shareholders more control of CEO pay would help, but the public—not just shareholders—has a stake in these decisions. Imposing pay caps—on all executives, not only those at bailed-out firms—would be better. Making the income tax much more progressive than Obama would do with his modest, if welcome, tax reforms is also necessary.

But as Blackwell argues, controlling salaries alone will not fix the underlying problems with the corporate system. We need, he says, to create a new legal and regulatory system that aligns corporations with social needs.

The new corporate accountability, Blackwell says, should involve requiring boards of directors to include major stakeholders—workers, government and communities; instituting collective bargaining laws that shift the balance of power between workers and managers; and creating a public expectation of ethical and socially responsible behavior.

The economic crisis, and the furor over executive pay and behavior, provides us with an opportunity not just to rein in ridiculous CEO compensation but also to re-make the corporate system.

As Wolff says, beyond controlling pay, “a new kind of corporation has to evolve.” ■

BY MARTIN STAINTHORP

Modern-Day Monkeywrencher

On Dec. 19, Tim DeChristopher, 27, walked into a Bureau of Land Management building in Salt Lake City where an auction was being held. The federal government was selling drilling rights on 164,000 acres of land in Utah's Red Rock Country. Earlier that month, several environmental

groups—including the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA), the Wilderness Society and Earth Justice—had filed a lawsuit challenging the auction. They objected to the leasing of 110,000 acres of public lands, most of which are adjacent to Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, and argued that drilling would damage views and increase pollution.

When DeChristopher entered the building, officials mistook him for a bidder and allowed him to enter the auction, where he was given a bidding paddle—number 70. The University of Utah economics student says he stood out in a room filled mostly with veteran oil and gas men, but he started holding up his paddle to bid. By the time officials caught on and stopped the auction, DeChristopher had acquired the rights to 12 parcels of land, totaling 22,000 acres—for \$1.79 million that he didn't have.

He later told authorities he had engaged in civil disobedience to protect the land and was willing to go to prison for his actions. Attracting media attention and support from around the world, DeChristopher raised enough money to offer an initial \$45,000 payment for the lands he had acquired, but the Bureau of Land Management refused it.

On Jan. 17, the environmental groups won their lawsuit, and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar later invalidated 77 controver-

sial leases from the auction, including all of DeChristopher's. Despite the victory, he still faces federal criminal charges.

In These Times called DeChristopher in Salt Lake City, where he lives.

Why did you intervene in the auction?

It was a rushed attempt to sell off some of the most precious lands in southern and eastern Utah right before Bush left office. And there were a lot of examples of how rushed it was. One of the most entertaining is that when they first announced what parcels were up for auction, they included land in the city of Moab that had houses on it. They included the land underneath the Moab golf course, which they tried to auction off to drill.

There was a lot of opposition to it, and the environmental impact statement wasn't adequately done and didn't factor in a lot of the costs associated with drilling. And the public comment period was rushed and people were obstructed from getting accurate information.

Who were some of the other bidders?

A lot of them were small energy producers who were intending to later flip the parcels, to sell them to the bigger companies. There were a few bigger companies there, like Bill Barrett Corporation. And I was told that one of the companies I was bidding against was Halliburton.

What is your reaction to Secretary Salazar's decision to invalidate 77 of the leases, including all of yours?

I was encouraged by Salazar's decision. I saw it as a strong stand by our new administration to protect the land and to protect the climate. The administration not only reinforced the lawsuit, but it also went well beyond the grounds of the lawsuit to challenge those underlying resource management plans.

I see this as the way the environmental movement should be working: with some of the big groups on the inside, like SUWA and NRDC, that are working through their means—whether through lawsuits or whatever is available to them. And then people like me, on the outside, pushing the boundaries and doing the controversial stuff that the big groups can't do.

Could the lawsuit alone have produced this outcome or was your action necessary?

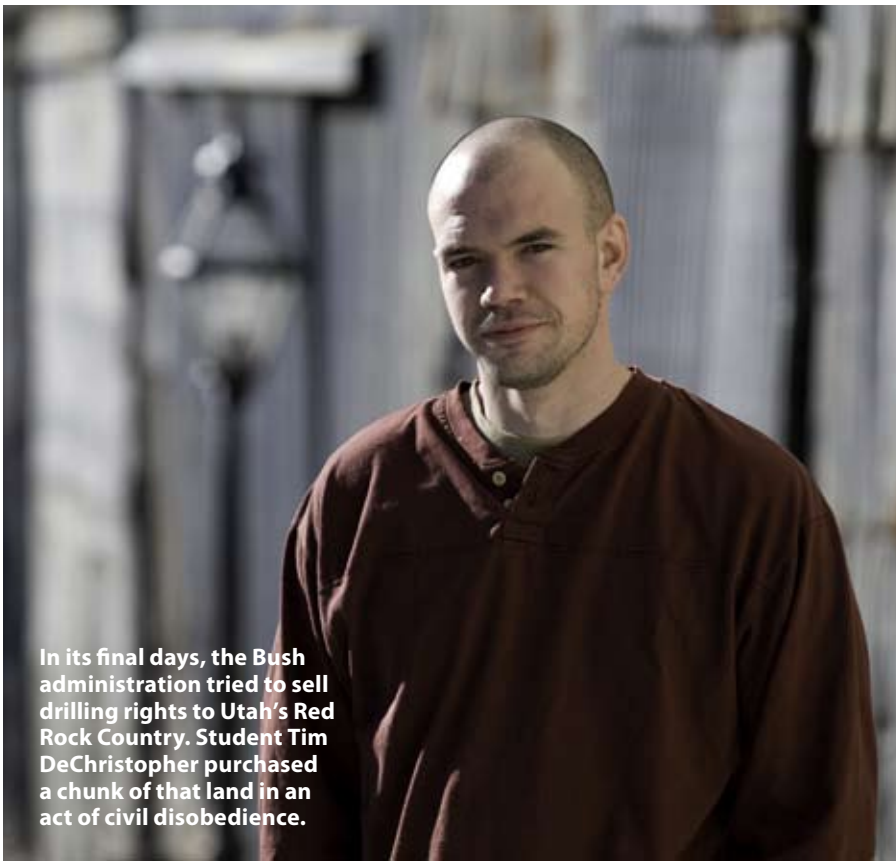
My action was certainly needed and that's the feedback I've gotten from a lot of people involved in this issue. It brought to light the injustice behind this auction. And it kept it in the media and the public eye for that month or so after the auction before Salazar made his decision.

What's going to happen to the 77 parcels now?

Now the government goes back and considers whether it's really a good idea to be auctioning off this land for oil and gas development. It'll look at the land's real value and hopefully do an accurate environmental impact statement that weighs the costs of air pollution, the cost of road building, the loss of recreation—all those things it hadn't considered before.

Do you still expect to be criminally charged?

I would expect that it would still happen. The Salazar decision didn't erase the case



In its final days, the Bush administration tried to sell drilling rights to Utah's Red Rock Country. Student Tim DeChristopher purchased a chunk of that land in an act of civil disobedience.

against me even though it did protect the land for now. The one thing that it did is take away the damages from my case, which I think puts me in a better legal position because there's no way that they can show \$1.7 million of damages to anyone. And because the decision is an official ruling stating that this auction was inappropriate and illegal, it strongly supports the idea that what I was standing up against was something unjust.

Have you been surprised by all the support you've received?

I've been very surprised by that and surprised by how broad that support is. It's been coming from all over the country and from across the political spectrum. A lot of mainstream folks are supporting this not-so-mainstream action.

From my lawyer, Patrick Shea—the former director of the Bureau of Land Management [under Clinton], who's now joining my side and supporting what I did—to a lot of professors and folks at the university who are supporting what I did. Last week I went to Utah Valley University, to Orem and Provo, and had two speaking engagements down there. And

that's really the most conservative part of Utah, which is one of the most conservative states in the country. I received a huge amount of support there.

How do you feel about people equating your action with that of Edward Abbey and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*?

I was a big fan of Edward Abbey, especially when I was younger. And in the last couple months, I've met a lot of Edward Abbey's close friends and some of the people who inspired the characters in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. What they told me is that my actions are categorically different than monkeywrenching. The monkeywrenching of Abbey's style was something solitary that one did at night and then snuck away and never talked about again. Whereas what I did was more in line with civil disobedience, of people openly standing in the way of an unjust law or an unjust system and accepting the consequences for it.

In the weeks following the auction, you raised about \$100,000, much of which was intended to pay for the lands. Since that option is now off the table, what do you plan to do with the money?

About \$40,000 of that money is in the legal fund that we'll hang on to because it looks like there's a good chance that this case will go to trial. And we'll probably need quite a bit more than that.

The rest of the money is in the lease purchase fund. I'm drafting a letter right now that I'm going to send out in the next few days to all the donors, informing them of what the situation is and asking them whether they want the money returned, put toward my legal fund or put toward another similar cause, namely the nonprofit group that I've helped launch in the last two months called Peaceful Uprising—a group that seeks to be the direct action side of the environmental movement that has been lacking in recent years.

Our mission is to train and support and defend those who take nonviolent direct action to protect our future from climate change.

In promoting more aggressive, grass-roots tactics within the environmental movement, you've expressed criticism of some of the mainstream environmental groups for not pushing people to act outside of traditional methods, such as donating money, writing letters and signing petitions.

All of that stuff is necessary and it needs to continue to be an important part of the movement, but it can't constitute the whole movement, especially an environmental movement where there are entrenched interests on the other side.

The fossil fuels industry, for example, is profiting off the destruction of our future. We're battling against this huge force that has far more political power than the movement does. That industry gets to write the rules.

If the environmental movement always plays by the rules, there's no way we can win. There's no way we can defend our future. And we're always going to be backpedaling, which is what we've seen in the movement for the last 20 years. We've basically tried to just put out fires and gone from one fire to another and we're always losing ground.

So, if the environmental movement is going to make progress, it must shift the center and shift what's considered reasonable. There needs to be that direct action side of it. ■



On Feb. 5, an Iranian woman walks past a poster showing the late founder of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, addressing supporters in Tehran.

ATTIA KENARE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

BY DOUG IRELAND

Iran's History Comes Out

A leading Iranian scholar in exile has published a new work of history and analysis that is a howitzer aimed squarely at the hypocrisies of today's sexually repressive theocratic Iranian regime—whose violent repression of the women's movement

and lethal campaign to purge homosexuality have revolted the world.

Janet Afary's *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, March) meticulously details the historical evolution of gender and sexuality, and of the roles and customs of women and same-sexers, from pre-modern Persia (500 to 1500 A.D.) right through the sexual revolution that began in Iran seven decades ago.

This panorama of Iranian sexual and gender mores and behavior, informed by a deep understanding of the role of class in the molding of sexual codes, will be a seminal work for years to come. And by reclaiming a richly textured, hidden history that the ayatollahs of the Islamic Republic of Iran have tried to erase, the

book gives today's vibrant Iranian women's movement—and the nascent agitation by Iranian queers for their own liberation—a powerful weapon.

Women were rigorously segregated in pre-modern Persia, even at home, as families divided houses into an outer section that was the exclusive province of the men, and an inner section to which women were confined. But veiling was a practice that was widespread only at the top of the socioeconomic pyramid, serving as a marker of class distinction. (The veil impeded the work of women in the rural and largely impoverished agricultural economy, and was seldom worn by them.)

All formal marriages were arranged, often with girls just entering puberty, often leading to loveless

relations. This fostered the institution of temporary marriage, or *sigh*, which could last from a few hours to 99 years. Lower-level clerics supplemented their incomes by serving as brokers (or procurers) of *sigh* marriages for both men and women. Religious pilgrimage cities, such as Mashad, served as sexual spas, where not only men but women in *aqdi* (or formal) marriages—rejected in the bedroom by their spouses in favor of a preferred *sigh* partner—could come to contract their own *sigh* couplings, or to find a younger cleric who served in essence as their gigolo.

And while homosexual acts were in theory condemned as sins by Islamic teaching, in practice they were rarely punished and were widely tolerated in pre-modern Iran, much as many Catholics tolerate pre- and extramarital hetero sex today.

Indeed, what Afary terms a “romantic bisexuality” was celebrated and even highly codified. For more than a millennium, Afary writes, “male homoerotic relations in Iran were bound by rules of courtship such as the bestowal of presents, the teaching of literary texts, bodybuilding and military training, mentorship, and the development of social contacts that would help the junior partner’s career.”

She continues:

Sometimes men exchanged vows, known as brotherhood *sighs* with homosocial or homosexual overtones. These relationships were not only about sex, but also about cultivating affection between the partners, placing certain responsibilities on the man with regard to the future of [their usually younger lover]. Sisterhood *sighs* involving lesbian practices were also common in Iran. A long courtship was important in these relations. The couple traded gifts, traveled together to shrines, and occasionally spent the night together.

Examples of the codes governing same-sex relations can be found in the “Mirror for Princes genre of literature (*andarz nameh*), [which] refers to both homosexual and heterosexual relations. Often written by fathers for sons, or viziers for sultans, these books contained separate chapter headings on the treatment of male companions and of wives.” One such was the *Qabus Nameh* (1082-1083),

in which a father advises a son:

As between women and youths, do not confine your inclinations to either sex; thus you may find enjoyment from both kinds without either of the two becoming inimical to you. ... During the summer let your desires incline toward youths, and during the winter towards women.

Any lower-middle class merchant who could afford it often had a wife and an attractive young male assistant, who, among other functions, provided sexual pleasure for his master.

Afary dissects how “classical Persian literature (12th to 15th centuries) ... overflowed with same-sex themes (such as passionate homoerotic allusions, symbolism, and even explicit references to beautiful young boys).”

This was true not only of the Sufi poetic masters of this classical period, for whom “the bond between [same-sex] lover and beloved was ... based on a form of chivalry (*javan mardī*) and ... led one to higher ethical ideals,” but of the poems of the great 20th century poet Iraj Mirza (1874-1926), and “classical poets [who] also celebrated homosexual relationships between kings and their pages.”

Afary also notes that “homosexuality and homoerotic expressions were embraced in numerous other public spaces beyond the royal court, from monasteries and seminaries to taverns, military camps, gymnasiums, bathhouses and coffeehouses. ... Until the mid-17th century, male houses of prostitution (*amrad khaneh*) were recognized, tax-paying establishments.”

Any lower-middle class artisan or merchant who could afford to keep two persons had a wife and an attractive young male assistant, or go-fer, who served the triple function of attracting (male) customers to gaze on his beauty, helping with business, and providing sexual pleasure for his master.

In documenting the extent and complexity of same-sex relations during Iran’s history, Afary provides a thundering rebuttal to Iranian President Mah-

moud Ahmadinejad’s absurd claim at a September 2007 Columbia University appearance, that “In Iran, we don’t have homosexuals like in your country.”

Afary introduces us to a host of remarkable women, including precursors of women’s liberation like Tahereh Qurrat

al-’Ayn, who left her husband to become an advocate of the new Babi religion (an off-shoot of Shiite Islam) and who created a stir by her courageous public unveiling at a Babi convention in 1848; and Princess Taj al-Saltaneh (1854-1936), a Shah’s daughter who recounted in her memoir the horrors of being deflowered at the age of 8 in an arranged marriage, and who later became a social democratic sympathizer and advocate of women’s rights.

The open agitation for women’s rights, including companionate marriage, became widespread with the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, while the first modern women’s organizations were born in the 1920s as adjuncts of patriarchal leftist parties (which concentrated on economic and educational rights for women and women’s suffrage while shunning any challenge to traditional arranged marriage and sexual mores.)

One of Afary’s most stunning revelations is how political homophobia was introduced into Iran from the West, by an Azeri-language newspaper edited and published in the Russian Caucasus. *Molla Nasreddin*, also known as *MN*, appeared from 1906 to 1931, and it influenced the Iranian Revolution with a “significant new discourse on gender and sexuality.”

With an editorial board that embraced Russian social democratic concepts, including women’s rights, *MN* was also “the first paper in the Shi[ite] Muslim world to endorse normative heterosexuality.” Afary writes that “this illustrated satirical

paper, which circulated among Iranian intellectuals and ordinary people alike, was enormously popular in the region because of its graphic cartoons." *MN*'s attacks on homosexuality "would shape Iranian debates on sexuality for the next century," and in their wake, "leading constitutionalists enthusiastically joined the campaign against homosexuality."

One of those greatly influenced by *MN* was Ahmad Kasravi, whose nationalist movement, *Pak Dini* (Purity of Religion), developed a broad following. Kasravi preached that "homosexuality was a measure of cultural backwardness," that Sufi poets of homoeroticism led "parasitic" lives, and that their queer poetry "was dangerous and had to be eliminated." Kasravi's *Pak Dini* movement "went so far as to institute a festival of book burning, held on winter solstice. Books deemed harmful and amoral were thrown into a bonfire in an event that seemed to echo the Nazi and Soviet-style notions of eliminating 'degenerate' art."

Eventually, Prime Minister Mahmoud Jam, who held office from 1935 to 1939, acceded to Kasravi's demand that homoerotic poems be banned. Afary notes sorrowfully that, "in this period, neither Kasravi nor feminists distinguished between rape or molestation of boys and consensual same-sex relations between adults."

While the law against veiling of women was promulgated in 1936, by the end of the 1940s, nearly all traces of sympathetic homosexuality had been eliminated from textbooks, newspapers and public discourse.

Afary, president of the International Society of Iranian Scholars, is a professor of history and women's studies at Purdue University. On nearly every page of her engaging, amply illustrated new book, she disinters morsels of history and analysis that will surprise even those with a more than casual knowledge of Iran. Her account goes right up to the contemporary women's movement and today's ongoing sexual revolution, including the latest in Iranian gay liberation discourse.

Sexual Politics in Modern Iran is an invaluable landmark, a signpost on the road to an end of gender discrimination and sexual liberation for all. ■



In *Sugar*, first-time actor Algenis Perez Soto (left) plays a gifted pitcher from the Dominican Republic.

FILM

No Sugar-Coating Immigration

By Brandon Harris

BROOKLYN-BASED FILMMAKERS RYAN FLECK and Anna Boden have followed up their self-assured 2006 feature debut, *Half Nelson*, with another success. Their new immigration/baseball drama, *Sugar*, may be the best American sports movie and the most touching immigration saga of the decade.

As much as North American and Asian populations are enamored with baseball, their enthusiasm hardly compares with the passion found in many Latin American countries, where the game referred to as "beisbol" has inspired legions of obsessed young ballplayers and spectators. In Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, baseball and soccer are the only games in town. Twenty-nine of the 30 Major League Baseball (MLB) franchises now run developmental "academies" in the Dominican Republic and other baseball-rich Latin countries to mine talent from the region. Almost three out of every 10 MLB players hails from a Latin American country.

With *Sugar*, Fleck and Boden plumb the depths of this world and deliver a lovely sophomore effort, a film that is as much about loneliness as it is about our national pastime. Non-professional actor Algenis Perez Soto plays the title

character, Miguel "Sugar" Santos, a gifted young pitcher from the Dominican Republic who is discovered and plucked for a chance at baseball stardom. He leaves his family and girlfriend to play Double A ball in the Kansas City Knights' system and struggles as much with self-doubt and solitude as he does with keeping his breaking ball down.

As they did with young Shareeka Epps in *Half Nelson*, Fleck and Boden have elicited an authentic and heart-rending portrayal from a first-time actor. Soto's expressive face reveals the contours of the modern-day immigrant experience. It's a performance that is full of both comedic and melancholic moments of dislocation and misunderstanding, such as when Sugar insists on ordering French toast at an Iowa diner for meal after meal, because it's the only food he can name in English.

Fleck and Boden's slick dolly moves, whip pans, and rack focus shot openings are a departure in style from the handheld cameras moves and dim frames of *Half Nelson*. As the film's plot moves from the Dominican Republic to Iowa to New York City, the style gently mirrors Sugar's emotional journey, moving from the warm and colorful palette and loose style of the Dominican sequences to the more rigid compositions of Iowa baseball fields.

As the film's focus expands, Sugar's experiences reveal not only the labors of bright-eyed young ballplayers striving for their slice of the American Dream, but also those of all immigrants who

struggle to adjust to our language and customs—and the harsh realities of American life on the margins.

Fleck and Boden bring to life an array of fascinating characters, including the elderly couple who houses Sugar in their Iowa farmhouse; the churchgoing young blonde whom he begins to fancy; and the hotshot, Stanford-educated, first-round pick whom he befriends. It is these people who provide a testament to the filmmakers' roving eye for specifics and their hunger for a small story, grandly told. Particularly good is former Cincinnati Reds pitcher José Rijo as the cigar-smoking Dominican scout who discovers Sugar's prowess, and Michael Gaston as his no-nonsense minor league manager.

A film that baseball fans—demoralized by the steroid era (which the film touches on)—will find helps restore their passion for this most elegant and cerebral of games, *Sugar* will also enthrall anyone who is fascinated by the endurance (and the underside) of America's ideals. ■

FILM

Romancing the Terrorists

By Christina Gerhardt

WOODEN BATONS WIELDED by German police club students, gashing their foreheads. Water cannons explode, toppling people in their path like bowling pins. Mounted police horses charge at demonstrators. A gunshot rings out.

So begins the Oscar-nominated *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, which tells the history of the Red Army Faction (RAF), a German terrorist group active from 1970 to 1998.

The film—based on Stefan Aust's book of the same title—presents the German student movements from 1967 to 1970, and the history of the RAF from its inception in 1970 to the deaths of its first generation in the Stammheim maximum-security

prison in 1977. Featuring archival footage and dramatic re-enactments, *The Baader Meinhof Complex* blurs the distinction between documentary and fictional films, thus highlighting the role that cinema plays in shaping our understanding of history. But what type of history of left-wing extremism does the film provide?

To a large extent, the film's fast-moving pace—prodded along by its quick cross cuts and heavy reliance on one-liners—prevents a substantive engagement with the problematic politics, domestic and international, that led to the group's actions.

The opening sequence depicts the June 2, 1967, fatal shooting of Benno Ohnesorg, an unarmed student demonstrator, who was killed by police officer Karl Heinz Kurras. Ohnesorg was protesting the Shah of Iran's visit to Berlin. Yet the film does not mention that the students were demonstrating the Shah's repressive regime at home.

Already on the edge, the events of June 2, 1967, further radicalized the student movement. In an emergency meeting held that

[art space]



WOMEN AND WAR

Since 1998, when civil war broke out in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), more than 5.4 million people have died—most of preventable diseases—making it the deadliest conflict since World War II. Today, 45,000 people continue to die each month despite an official declaration of peace.

The photo exhibit "Congo/Women" tells the story of DRC women's lives under the brutality of war. It features life-sized pictures of Congolese women, with essays accompanying each photograph.

The traveling exhibit will be at the James Cohan Gallery in New York City until March 16. It will then travel to Brussels, London, Geneva, Tokyo and the U.N. Lobby Exhibition Space in New York.

For more information, visit www.congowomen.org.

—Micah Uetricht

evening, future RAF member Gudrun Ensslin stated: "This fascist state means to kill us all. ... Violence is the only answer to violence." *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, however, never questions critically the group's stance and its use of violence.

In 1968, Ensslin (played by Johanna Wokalek), Andreas Baader (Moritz Bleibtreu) and two others set a Frankfurt department store on fire. Their goal was to "light a torch for Vietnam," "protest against indifference to the war" and against "monopoly capitalism." After a German court ordered the four arsonists to prison in November 1969, Baader and Ensslin fled. In 1970, Baader was pulled over by a police officer and thrown in jail.

The RAF wasn't officially founded until 1970, when prominent journalist Ulrike Meinhof (Martina Gedeck) helped break Baader out of jail. Meinhof had become sympathetic to the student movement, particularly after witnessing the violent backlash against demonstrations and the skewed representation of them in the corporate media.

After the jail break, the group fled to a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) camp in Jordan. By showing how RAF members insisted the group be housed together—not separated by gender, as its Muslim hosts preferred—and how female RAF members sunbathed nude, the film provides titillation but fails to explore why the group sympathized with the Palestinians and how this sympathy intersected with Germany's fascist past. (This intersection is key with regard to the RAF, given some of the group's overtly anti-Semitic statements in its communiqués.) The solidarity with the Palestinians spanned from its 1970 training at this camp to the 1977 hijacking of a Lufthansa flight bound for Mogadishu, Somalia, by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to demand the release of 11 imprisoned RAF members.

After the first hour of the film, one feels bludgeoned by the plot's rushing momentum: a heavy soundtrack plays while bullets fly or buildings explode; cut to a TV screen showing the day's attack on the news; pan back to German Police Chief Herold (Bruno Ganz)—or RAF members—watching the footage; cut to the next attack.

excerpt



DEMYSTIFYING PERIODS, PERIOD.

In *My Little Red Book* (Twelve, February), editor Rachel Kauder Nalebuff puts together an anthology of stories about first periods in an effort, in her words, to "help us embrace the awkwardness [of the subject] and thereby end it." This story comes from Sharon Gerhard, a writer and former film producer:

My wonderful mystery of life started during my 10th summer. Lucky me.

I was away at summer camp for the first time in my life, and of course that's when it had to start, when I was away from ... that funny little kit with the belts and different-sized pads and informative little booklets that my mother had stashed away in a drawer for my sister. ...

And of course, this was our night camping out in the woods—boys and girls together, thank you very much—and it came in the middle of the night with the bloated stomach and the cramps and the feeling that I had to poop. ... I thought I had to go so bad that I finally decided it was more important to get up and stumble across to the outhouse in the pitch black. ... The outhouse had a little tiny night-light kind of thing with a gazillion bugs buzzing around it. It gave just enough light for me to see the mess my pants were in, and I hadn't the faintest idea what to do about it. At least I knew what it was, thanks to that annoying *Girl to Woman* film they showed us in school every year. ... That didn't help me much, though.



Finally I just put a giant wad of toilet paper in my pants and stayed awake all night. ... I didn't know what I was going to do with those underpants, though. They were ruined. I thought about burying them out there in the woods, but I knew I'd feel pretty stupid when the wild bears and mountain lions and hyenas dug them up and started fighting over them.

Fortunately, camp was over the next day. ... When we got home, sure enough, I started in with the belts and pads from my sister's kit.

It is a chronology of events lacking narrative tension or progression. Although the group's violence increases, no discussion follows of how this relates to the politics of leftist movements.

Character development is also lacking. Meinhof leaves her husband, abandons her children and joins the RAF, only to commit suicide in prison. Yet the audience never learns her thoughts, feelings or struggles as she goes through these transitions.

Other characters in the film remain equally flat. While the film could have shed light on the inner dynamics of the group, the personalities and motivations of its members, or even of its adversaries, it leaves instead a hollow string of actions.

What frustrates most about the two and a half-hour *Baader Meinhof Complex* is that, in seeking to present all events related

to the RAF from 1967 to 1977, it rarely slows down to allow the viewer room to reflect.

Had the film instead explored with focus and depth any aspect of the era and the group, it could have been edifying: the legacy of the fascist era in Germany, the failures of representative democracy for leftists, the impact of international anti-imperialist struggles, the tensions between the group and other leftists, or the tensions internal to the group. Indeed, the RAF's history offers insights to a legacy of terrorism that remains a daily feature of life and politics.

Yet, rather than engaging substantively any of the risks involved or the historical and political contexts, the film depicts the RAF in a glamorous light, as though terrorism is sexy and not tactically fraught. It is a view that, much like the RAF itself, is deeply shortsighted. ■

Sex, Drugs, ESL

Continued from back page

Road shows that prostitution is rampant in Bangkok. Women are at work everywhere here. Some sit in giggling groups at outdoor bars, while others stand upon revolving platforms or long tables, listlessly gyrating against metal poles, a number pinned to whatever scrap of fabric is stretched decoratively across their bodies. The clientele are largely white and middle-to-late age. They stumble from these venues in search of beer and food (“not too spicy”), then back for more women.

In poor parts of the country, it is not unusual for women to be sold into the trade by their own families. I remember a Thai newspaper article several years ago in which a mother voiced regret for not selling her daughter for more money. While foreigners are the sex industry’s most visible clientele, Thai men are also guilty of using and abusing prostitutes.

HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases are rampant among sex workers. Some teachers I knew often came to work with visible lesions and sores because they frequented brothels. When the subject came up, teachers tried to explain it away with the wave of a hand and a shrug. “It’s good for the economy” is the most common response. “They are making their own money.” As if by engaging in sex with a woman for money they are contributing not only to the business sector, but also to the women’s lib movement.

The second most popular justification is that it’s “part of their culture and who are we to interfere?” As though having sex with a prostitute in Thailand is akin to a pig-roast in Hawaii or a thermal pool in Iceland. You simply haven’t experienced Thailand until you’ve tried it!

It wasn’t until the 2006 arrest of John Mark Carr—infamous for falsely confessing to the murder of Jon Benet Ramsey—that people began to look at the lawlessness of the English teaching profession. Carr had been an English teacher by day and pedophile on his off time. As international camera crews flew in, the Thai government began to crack down on what was becoming an embarrassment to the country.

A ripple of nervousness flowed through the teaching community as the Thai government passed new laws demanding background checks for all teachers. The government also promised that college degrees would be verified and that all new rules would be strictly enforced.

Around the same time, the government imposed tougher immigration

prestigious school in Bangkok, where he had been well respected. During his spare time, he arranged for Americans to visit his home in Thailand to sexually abuse boys under the age of 12 for payment.

On Jan. 1, 2009, Wrenshall’s colleague Steve Schertzer wrote a letter on Ajarn—a website devoted to the teaching community in Thailand—describing Wrenshall

One justification for Thailand’s sex industry is that it’s ‘part of their culture.’ As though having sex with a prostitute there is akin to a pig-roast in Hawaii or taking a dip in a thermal pool in Iceland.

rules allowing only a limited number of 15-day visa renewals. Previously, teachers could ferry themselves in busloads to the border, where they could walk across a bridge to Cambodia, get their passports stamped, then walk back to Thailand. This allowed them another 30 days in Thailand without needing any work visa. You could live there for years this way, traveling to the border once a month.

Of all of the so-called reforms, only the immigration laws have stuck. The other laws were only less conspicuously broken in the beginning before being blatantly disregarded later. (After all, prostitution is technically illegal in Thailand.) I spoke with more than 30 teachers in January 2009, and not one had gone through a background check or had his or her diploma verified.

Since the “crackdown,” the Thai government has arrested a slew of English teachers, most of them long-wanted by Interpol for sex crimes. In January 2007, law enforcement arrested Sean McMahon, 45. McMahon was from Oxford and had been teaching in Thailand since he disappeared in April 1999 after jumping bail for the alleged rape of an 8-year-old girl. In October 2007, officials detained English teacher Christopher Paul Neil, 32, in northeast Thailand. Neil is suspected of appearing in more than 200 online images of child abuse.

The most recent teacher-related scandal came this past December with the arrest of Canadian John Wrenshall, 62. Wrenshall had been a longtime employee of a

as a generous and kind man, and his subsequent disgust at finding out about the teacher’s double life:

Who the hell do these people think they are? These supervisors, these board of education officials, these school owners. Well, maybe they are not child molesters but, at the end of the day, they’re doing something. If they’re not pimping little boys, then they’re beating their wife. If they’re not beating their wife, then they’re beating their dog. If they’re not beating their dog, then they’re beating their meat to Internet porn, assuming they can find their meat after 12 beers. If they’re not beating their meat to Internet porn, then they hang out in red-light districts. . . . John Wrenshall and his ilk make up more of the TEFL [Teaching English as a Foreign Language] industry than any of us dare to admit.

I am back in Bangkok, my teaching career long over. I sit in partial shade at a small table in an outdoor restaurant with Allan, a portly man who looked to be in his early 50s. He works in China but sees a life here, he says, where things are easier for someone like him. He tells me about the women he has met at the bars down the road. They all want him, he says.

Doesn’t it bother him to pay for sex? Allan smiles: “We just don’t know what it’s like for them here. How can we judge?” He says this, waving one hand, palm up, in innocence, as the other hand tips a 20-ounce Chang beer to his lips.

“We know what it’s like to be a human being,” I reply, taking a drink from my own bottle.

After which, there is really nothing more to say. ■



STEPHEN SHAVER/AP/GETTY IMAGES

SEX, DRUGS AND ESL

BY JESSICA OLLEN

LIKE MANY YOUNG ENGLISH teachers abroad, I was enthusiastic about—but woefully under-qualified for—my new profession. I wanted to see some of the world before I transitioned to another “more respectable” job. So, after graduating from college, I flew to Thailand and took a bus to a fishing village a few hours east of Bangkok, where I spent three weeks binge-drinking and hanging out on the beach with 15-or-so classmates—and emerged with certification to teach English to speakers of foreign languages.

I was promptly offered a job at a language school in Bangkok, teaching after-school lessons to high school and college students. I once ran into the head teacher of my school on his way home with a prostitute he had picked up at a bar. Drunk-

enly, he swung his lit cigarette into her arm, burning her, then looked down at the smoldering remnants and said, “At least it’s still lit.” Needless to say, this man didn’t go around giving background checks to his staff (who held daily forums in the teachers’ room discussing the varying quality of women in Bangkok’s many sex districts), nor bother finding out if their diplomas were valid. Many teachers in Thailand do not even hold college degrees, preferring to purchase diplomas online or on the Bangkok black market.

Thai women are especially prone to exploitation. Ever since American soldiers stopped off here for R&R during the Vietnam War, Thailand has been a premium destination for sex tourists—and their more permanent incarnation, known as “sexpats.”

A quick walk around the area surrounding central Sukhumvit

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